

IN THE GREAT WILD NORTH



D. LANGE



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IN THE GREAT WILD NORTH

**"INDIAN" STORIES
WITH HISTORICAL BASES**

By D. LANGE

12mo Cloth Illustrated

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ON THE TRAIL OF THE SIOUX

**THE SILVER ISLAND OF THE
CHIPPEWA**

LOST IN THE FUR COUNTRY

IN THE GREAT WILD NORTH

THE LURE OF THE BLACK HILLS

LOTHROP, LEE & SHEPARD CO., BOSTON



“BAD LAKE,” SAID WAHITA, AS HE LOOKED OVER THE “TURBULENT WAVES IN THE MORNING.” — *Page 104.*

IN THE GREAT WILD NORTH

BY
Dietrich
D. LANGE
11

AUTHOR OF "ON THE TRAIL OF THE SIOUX," "THE SILVER
ISLAND OF THE CHIPPEWA," AND "LOST IN
THE FUR COUNTRY"

ILLUSTRATED BY W. L. HOWES



BOSTON
LOTHROP, LEE & SHEPARD CO.

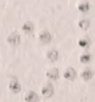
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Published, October, 1915
Entered at Stationers' Hall, London

IN THE GREAT WILD NORTH

To replace lost copy
Oct. 13/20



Norwood Press
BERWICK & SMITH CO.
NORWOOD, MASS,
U. S. A.

PREFACE

This book, like its three predecessors, contains a picture from a certain period of American life and history. The story begins at the close of our second war with England.

The events of the first part of the tale occur at the old and well-known trading-post of York Factory on Hudson Bay.

For the second part, the scene shifts to Fort Douglas, near the junction of the Assiniboin and Red Rivers, where the Selkirk settlers made the first attempt to convert the buffalo-plains into wheat-fields. Out of this lonely and adventurous Selkirk settlement have grown the great city of Winnipeg and the agricultural empire of Western Canada.

The third shift of scenery takes the reader over the great northern buffalo-range from Fort Douglas and historic Pembina to the foothills of the Big Horn Mountains.

The fourth and last part of the story gives a glimpse of life in the great beaver country of the foot hills, where the great expedition

of Lewis and Clark, some ten years previous, had shown a wealth of fur.

I have taken pains to be accurate on all points of both natural and political history, locality, manners, and customs. The story itself and its characters, I prefer to leave to my readers without any introduction.

Perhaps some who read these pages may be able to travel in a white man's canoe over at least a part of the route which Steve McLean and his father followed under the guidance of old Wahita, the Cree Indian.

The Great Wild North has changed but little in a century. Nor has the West lost its charm and romance. To travel on horseback over the plains and foothills is as fascinating to-day as it was in the time of our story.

D. LANGE.

St. Paul, Minnesota.

August, 1915.

CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. AGROUND IN FIVE-FATHOM HOLE . . .	1
II. IN THE FORT ON HUDSON BAY . . .	11
III. CAMP HUNTERS	26
IV. CHRISTMAS AT HUDSON BAY	37
V. A COLD SWIM	56
VI. THE GOING OF THE RIVER	64
VII. THE LAST GREAT HUNT ON THE MARSH .	73
VIII. THE GREAT CANOE TRIP WITH WAHITA .	83
IX. A HARD STRETCH	93
X. ON THE LAKE OF THE BIG WINDS . .	100
XI. TO THE END OF THE BIG LAKE . . .	117
XII. IN THE WAR ZONE	126
XIII. WITH THE CREES AND BY THEMSELVES .	136
XIV. ALONE IN THE FOREST	148
XV. A WINTER IN TEPEE AND DUGOUT . .	167
XVI. IN THE HOUSE OF THE BEAVER PEOPLE .	190
XVII. WAHITA IN TROUBLE	203
XVIII. THE GREAT BUFFALO HUNT	209
XIX. THE HUNTER'S PARADISE	218
XX. THE CAMP NEAR THE RIM ROCK . . .	227
XXI. CATCHING THE KING OF THE AIR . .	236
XXII. GETTING HOMESICK	247
XXIII. STALKED BY A PANTHER	257
XXIV. THE LAST JOURNEY AND THE LONGEST .	268

ILLUSTRATIONS

“Bad lake,” said Wahita, as he looked over the turbulent waves in the morning (Page 104)	<i>Frontispiece</i>
	FACING PAGE
“There comes a small schooner to take us ashore” .	8
“Now come, boy!” he cried	60
“Come oot, laddie, come oot!”	194
Each man dashed into the herd	212
The eagle was firmly grasped by one foot	250

IN THE GREAT WILD NORTH

CHAPTER I

AGROUND IN FIVE-FATHOM HOLE

THE Hudson Bay Company's ship, *Prince Rupert*, had once more safely made its dangerous annual passage from England to York Factory, and, in the middle of the afternoon of August tenth, 1815, the captain dropped anchor in Five-Fathom Hole off the mouth of Hayes River. On account of the low shores and shallow water the big ship could not go closer to land, where the "ship's beacon" and the low wooden buildings of York Factory were plainly visible seven miles away on the banks of Hayes River.

The *Prince Rupert* carried not only the

2 IN THE GREAT WILD NORTH

goods and provisions for the numerous isolated posts of the great fur company, but it also had brought about twenty-five passengers for that romantic and adventurous enterprise known as the Red River Settlement. For two months the ship had tacked back and forth against contrary winds, had rolled and bounced on the white-crested waves of the Atlantic, had then beaten her way through the ice floes and had dodged the great glistening icebergs of Davis Strait; and now, at last, she was safely anchored in sight of the low shores of Hudson Bay that stretched out to east and west like endless, dark-green flats as far as the eye could see.

Of all the passengers on board, none were more anxious to set foot on dry land than little Steve McLean and his father, for they had not only made the long voyage from London to York Factory, but they had also within six months made an equally long sea voyage from New York to Scotland.

When, about a year before, little Steve's mother had died in New York, David McLean,

Steve's father, had grown lonesome and homesick in America and had decided to go back to his native parish of Kildonan in the highlands of northern Scotland. But, when he finally arrived after a most tedious journey of nearly three months, he was a very much disappointed man. The little cottage of his father had disappeared, and on the hillside, where he used to help his father harvest the scanty crop of oats, barley, and potatoes, a flock of dull sheep were grazing.

During the previous ten years many Scotch and English cotters had been forced to leave their homes and small farms, for the landlords had found that it was more profitable to convert their large holdings into sheep pastures than to rent them to small tenant cotters.

David McLean discovered that his few remaining boyhood friends had almost forgotten him. It was difficult to make them understand the stories he told about New York, and he felt that many of them thought he was a lying braggart. Most of the lads with whom

4 IN THE GREAT WILD NORTH

he had attended the old kirk at Kildonan, with whom he had roamed the hills and fought his boyhood battles, were scattered to the ends of the earth; a large number, including his best friend, George McGolrick, had gone with Lord Selkirk's people to Red River in America.

For a few days David McLean and Steve wandered about as if lost, and the more David saw, the more homesick he grew for America. On the first Sunday evening as he and Steve sat alone in the tavern he had almost made up his mind what to do.

"What think 'ee lad?" he asked, "'boot going back to America? What think 'ee of going to Red River? They say the land is right gude, and plenty of it, and no rocks like here in Scotland. To be sure, there be Indians, and buffaloes and wolves, but methinks they will nae eat a Scotchman."

At the sounds of Indians, buffaloes and wolves, Steve, who had been almost asleep, became quickly wide awake.

"Yes, Father," he replied quickly, "let's

go! There's nothing in this country but sheep and hills and rocks. The Indians and buffaloes will nae eat Scotchmen."

The truth is that Steve, although he had not dared to say so, had grown much disgusted with the country about which his father had told him such wonderful stories.

In those days most of the people around Kildonan still spoke the Gaelic language or Highland Scotch, of which Steve knew only a few words. When his father talked about America to the guests in the tavern, Steve sat in a corner by himself. The lads of his own age often came and stared at him and made fun of him in words Steve could not understand. When he tried to talk to them they mocked him and laughed at his broken Gaelic. He had already had several fights in the court of the tavern, but now his father had forbidden him to fight any more, and the only way he could avoid fighting was by going about with his father or staying indoors. If he went out by himself, some large boy was pretty sure to come along with a lad of

6 IN THE GREAT WILD NORTH

Steve's size who would make faces and fists at him and say something in Gaelic which Steve knew meant: "I can lick thee, Yankee brat!"

So Steve's impressions of Scotland had not been happy, and when he heard the words: America, Red River, Indians, buffaloes, wolves, his imagination was ablaze and he was ready to go.

He had quite often seen Indians in New York and had often watched the bales of buffalo, wolf, beaver, and other skins hoisted on board the ships bound for Europe. It would be great if he could see all these animals alive and if he could also see Indians who still went on the war-path and rode wild ponies. A few straggling Indians occasionally traded in the stores of New York and squatted silently on the sidewalks.

At last he once more saw America, and visions of real boy life sprang up in his active brain, for he had spent the first five years of his life in a small town in Connecticut and the last five or six years he had lived in New

York City, where his father had been in the employ of John Jacob Astor, the great American fur merchant. In those days New York was a town of sixty thousand people, and still a good place for a boy to live in.

As he gazed toward the low shore which gradually closed in from the north and northeast, he was struck by its desolate, treeless appearance.

“Father,” he asked, “what has become of all the trees? Have they cut them all for firewood? You remember the big woods across the East River where you showed me the fat gray squirrel crawling into a knot-hole?”

David remembered it well. “I reckon, lad,” he replied, “this coast is too far north; trees don’t grow here, and we’ll find no gray squirrels.”

But now something moving attracted their attention.

“Look ’ee there, lad!” exclaimed David, “there comes a small schooner under full sail to take us ashore.”

8 IN THE GREAT WILD NORTH

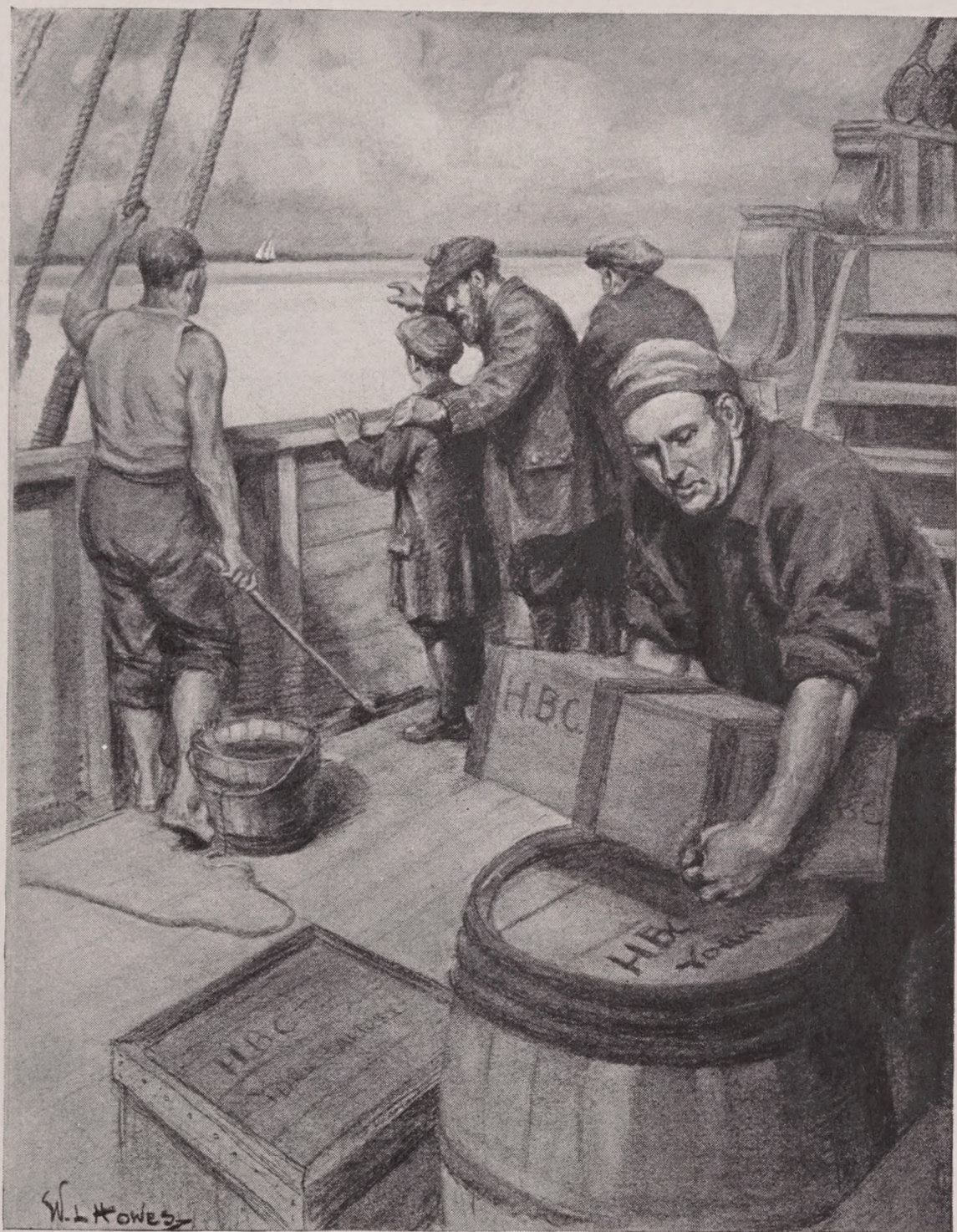
The schooner approached rapidly under a stern wind. In about half an hour they could make out through a glass the name, *Silver Fox*, painted on the bow.

Father and son and ten Selkirk passengers were ordered to descend the ladder as soon as the *Silver Fox* lay alongside the *Prince Rupert*, and the schooner began to tack toward the mouth of Hayes River. Its progress, however, was much too slow for the lad who was impatient to be once more in America, even if it was to be on the bleak shore of Hudson Bay.

But disappointment was in store for him. Behind the vast expanse of sea and flat shore to the northwest the sunset red faded into orange and then into blue, and as the stars were coming out the *Silver Fox* began to drift back toward the ship, with a strong outgoing tide.

"Let go the anchor!" the captain called out. "Can't make it to-night. Headwind and tide are too much for her."

Here they were, half-way between the ship



“THERE COMES A SMALL SCHOONER TO TAKE US ASHORE.”—Page 7.

and the land, anchored for the night in shallow water.

Very soon it grew too chilly on deck, and Steve and his father went below into the little cabin. Steve thought it was the smallest room he had ever seen. Seven or eight people were already there, some sitting on small stools and two men on a trunk. There was a bed against the wall, but nobody wanted to lie down on it, although all were equally tired. Steve squatted on a small box and David found a stool to sit on. A fish-oil lamp cast a weird light on the tired men and women and soon every one was silent.

Bump! went Steve's head against the wall. There was some little laughing when the boy quickly righted himself with a startled look in his deep blue eyes.

"Get thee doon on the bed!" a motherly woman urged him. "Lay thee doon, thee is sore sleepy."

"No, I'm awake, I'm awake," Steve protested. "I'll sit up."

For ten or fifteen minutes he did sit up,

10 IN THE GREAT WILD NORTH

then he tumbled clean over on the floor. By this time all the grown people were too sleepy even to laugh at the boy's plight, and without saying a word David McLean picked up the tired-out lad and placed him on the bed.

Toward early morning when the tide was lowest, the boat grounded and began to thump with the motion of the waves. Once the lad opened his eyes and looked about him, frightened and dazed, but when he saw his father and the other people still seated in the dingy cabin he lay down and again fell sound asleep in spite of the rocking and thumping of the boat.

CHAPTER II

IN THE FORT ON HUDSON BAY

ABOUT daylight, when both wind and tide turned, the *Silver Fox* weighed anchor and stood in toward the mouth of Hayes River. David McLean gently shook his sleeping boy by the arm.

“Wake up, laddie, wake up!” he spoke softly, “we’re going to land soon! Come, we’re almost there.”

The boy sat up wild-eyed at the word “land,” took his father’s hand and the two climbed on deck by a short, narrow stairway.

The passengers on deck were straining their eyes trying to distinguish the different factory buildings and the features of the landscape. The endless stretch of marsh, covered with tall rank grass and studded here and there with clumps of low arctic willows,

12 IN THE GREAT WILD NORTH

looked to their eyes wild and forbidding indeed, and by contrast called up in their minds pictures of bonnie Scotch hills with fragrant slopes of purple heather and tufts of golden gorse.

And now the schooner was made fast to the landing, where a strange-looking crowd awaited the newcomers.

“Oh, Father, look at all the Indians!” were Steve’s first words after he had been breathlessly watching the motley crowd. “Are they Indians that fight?”

But so many things attracted the attention of the responsive lad that he was off amongst the crowd before his father had time to answer.

Here were sure-enough real Indians. They were mostly clothed in white, red, or green blankets held to the body by a red belt. Leggings of cloth or caribou skin covered their legs below the knee. All wore moccasins, but not one of them wore either hat or cap.

Then there were quite a number of men who looked and were dressed almost like Indians.

They were the boatmen, mostly French half-breeds who once a year made the long, dangerous journey from one Hudson Bay post to another. Many of them had come from Jack River or Norway House just north of Lake Winnipeg, but some had come with furs as far as Red River, and all would start back as soon as they had received the goods and provisions for their different posts, scattered over half of Canada, a region as large as half of Europe.

The number of white men was also quite large. The governor was there and the doctor, besides accountants, clerks, and apprentices, and quite a number of workmen and servants.

But at no port had Steve ever seen so many dogs. Strange-looking dogs they were, too. Grayish or whitish in color, with big bushy tails and a savage, wolfish look. Steve wondered whether the Indians and half-breeds kept sheep, for he remembered that every shepherd in Scotland had a dog; however, these animals looked more like big fierce

14 IN THE GREAT WILD NORTH

wolves than like sheep dogs. Curious, too, was the freight piled up on the wooden platform. There were bales and bales and more bales of fur, nothing but fur: beaver, marten, fisher, lynx, bear, wolf, fox, muskrat, otter, buffalo, black bear, brown bear, and grizzly bear. Some of the skins, like those of the buffaloes and grizzlies, had been carried in canoes and on the backs of the voyageurs more than a thousand miles. Now all were ready for shipment to the great fur markets of Europe, to London, Paris, and Leipsic; for York Factory was the great shipping-point of the Hudson Bay Company.

The Hudson Bay Company, which began in London, England, as a Company of Gentlemen Adventurers, away back about 1670, had already grown to be the greatest fur company in the world, but at this time a powerful rival had grown up in Canada, at Montreal, the Northwest Company.

Could the Selkirk settlers who in high hopes made the long journey to Red River have known what hardships and suffering

the rivalry of those two great companies would bring them, they never would have left the sterile hills of Scotland for the rich black soil of Red River.

The Northwest Company has disappeared, having been absorbed by its rival, but the Hudson Bay Company still buys the furs from the Indians scattered over the whole of Canada, and with the gentle, but firm hand of commerce, as it has done for two hundred years, it still feeds and clothes and rules Cree and Chippewa and all the scattered tribes who will roam the northern woods and lakes and marshes as long as there are any woods and marshes left. And one who would feel the romance and the power and the reach of the great company should visit the two great trade emporiums of the H. B. C. at Winnipeg, which now stand on the very ground where a hundred years ago Nor'-westers and H. B. C. people fought their battles, where Scotch and Swiss farmers, French half-breeds and Indian buffalo-hunters, retired Hudson Bay factors and discharged

16 IN THE GREAT WILD NORTH

British soldiers lived and mingled in as motley a crowd as the world has ever seen.

The Hudson Bay Company still is a great fur-trading company, but it is also one of the greatest importing, jobbing, and mercantile companies, and everybody in Canada knows what H. B. C. stands for.

At the time of our story it was not only the greatest fur-trading company of the world, but it was also the greatest landowner in the world. In its charter of 1670 King Charles II granted to this "Company of Gentlemen Adventurers" in fee simple more than half the present Dominion of Canada. In this vast region, long known as Rupert's Land, the company owned all the land and was the government. It was not until 1871 that the company sold its title to the land and its sovereignty to the Dominion of Canada.

But in 1812, Lord Selkirk had bought of the company which was in financial difficulties on account of interruptions to the fur trade caused by the Napoleonic war, 110,000

square miles of land for the now famous Red River settlement, and hardy and tenacious Scotchmen, Orkneymen, and Swiss became the pioneer settlers of the great agricultural empire of Western Canada.

So much was there to be seen at York Factory after the arrival of the *Silver Fox* that Steve hardly found time to eat.

The great time for the Indians to come to York Factory and the other factories in Canada was the month of June, but enough Indians were even now encamped near the fort to make the life at the post very interesting. Besides the Indians, there were a great many rivermen or boatmen. A large fleet of boats had come from Norway House and there were smaller ones from Oxford House, from the Saskatchewan, and other distant forts.

Within a few days the *Silver Fox* had unloaded a great cargo of blankets, cotton cloth, axes, knives, beads, tobacco, needles, awls, kettles, guns, powder, lead, and all kinds of provisions for the trade and the needs of a

18 IN THE GREAT WILD NORTH

hundred distant posts scattered all over Canada.

As the small schooners went back and forth between the wharf at the factory and the *Prince Rupert*, anchored at Five-Fathom Hole, they took out with them valuable loads of furs, and on the sixth day the *Prince Rupert* sailed away with a cargo of fur valued at two hundred thousand dollars at Hudson Bay, but worth a million dollars in the London market.

Within a few more days all the river brigades had left, and the Selkirk settlers had started in flatboats and North Country wooden canoes for their destination on Red River, where untold and unexpected hardships awaited them; and once more York Factory settled down to a year of quiet life which would not be broken until next June, when the Indians would return to the fort with their winter's catch of fur, and when, a little later, fleets of the company's boats would again come down the river with their cargoes

of furs, and the ship from London would make its annual call.

Steve and his father did not go with the boats and the settlers to Red River. The governor had offered to David McLean the position of trader at the fort and David had accepted it. He was glad of the opportunity to increase his small capital which had sadly diminished on the long trip from New York to Scotland and back to America. He had also learned from the clerks at the fort that food was scarce at Red River and that trouble was brewing between the traders and men of the Northwest Company and those of the Hudson Bay Company, for the Northwesters feared that a settlement of farmers at Red River on lands of the Hudson Bay Company, and under its control, would hurt or even ruin the fur business of the Northwest Company. For these reasons David McLean, experienced in frontier life, had concluded not to go to Red River before he had earned a year's credit with the company, which he

20 IN THE GREAT WILD NORTH

might use the following year in the store maintained by the company at Fort Douglas on Red River.

During the next week Steve spent almost as much time in the trading-house as his father.

David McLean did not understand the language of the Swampy Crees, the Indians who traded at York Factory, but he had bought furs of the Indians in New York State, and an Indian trader does not need a large vocabulary; he needs to have a supply of goods, and needs to know fur and Indians. McLean knew furs, he knew Indians, and he had more goods on the plain wooden shelves and in boxes, barrels, and bags than the whole Cree nation could buy in two years.

Trading in a Hudson Bay store was very different from trading in a modern city department store.

About nine in the morning, when David and Steve opened their shop, several Crees were already waiting. In came the first one with his packs of fur. David at once began to sort

the skins according to quality and kind, and Steve helped till he was tired.

“You have made two hundred beavers,” said David; “pretty good catch.”

“Yes, good catch,” assented Ageemik, “good catch! Hunted alone. Beaver great plenty. Fox bark much, marten sneak around, get caught plenty.”

Ageemik, like many Crees near York Factory, spoke and understood considerable English, at least he knew the “fur talk” and “food talk” quite well, and most talk between Whites and Indians in the Great Wild North is fur talk and food talk even to this day.

Steve counted out two hundred wooden tags, his father recounted them and handed them to Ageemik, who tied them in a dirty blue handkerchief.

It was now time for Ageemik to begin his part of the trade. Very leisurely he looked at blankets, capotes, guns, traps, and cotton prints. When Steve had almost grown tired watching, Ageemik said, “Blanket.”

“Ten,” said David, and Ageemik returned

22 IN THE GREAT WILD NORTH

ten of the wooden tags. Next the Indian selected a gun, for which David demanded and received twenty tags.

Within two hours Ageemik had returned all his tags and was fifty tags in debt to the company, and in a corner he had quite a pile of goods. Two blankets, two shirts, twenty yards of cotton print, a red sash, thread, beads, handkerchiefs, awls, knives, needles, ten pounds of black tea, tobacco, traps, knives, fishhooks, lines, and other small articles, besides bullets, shot, powder, hatchets, and a violin.

“Squaw will be glad,” he grunted; “wants new dress for Christmas dance. Little girl wants beads, make fine moccasins. Boy Joe is crazy, wants music box with strings on. Frenchman Baptiste, he say he teach him play crazy dance music like white man.”

There was no hurry in all this trading, and it was almost noon when Ageemik had sold all the fur he had caught in a year and was once more happily in debt to the company.

The other Indians patiently waited their

turn. From twelve to two David locked the shop, and the Indians again waited. They rather enjoyed prolonging their stay at the factory. It was the great annual event in their lives, as good as Christmas, a circus, a big wedding, and Thanksgiving all combined to a country boy.

As for competition of other stores, there was none nearer than two hundred miles, and that belonged to the Hudson Bay Company.

Ageemik did not haggle about prices; he knew the company had just one price on all its goods. He was not suspicious about the quality, for he knew and could see that the articles were just as good as they were last year and the year before, just as good as they were when he first came to York Factory with his father. He knew the company never cheated its customers; that was as impossible and unthinkable as it would be for wild geese to return to Hudson Bay on Christmas Day.

Ageemik did, however, expect a present when he was through trading.

David McLean produced a roll of tobacco

24 IN THE GREAT WILD NORTH

twist and a powder-flask for Ageemik, a red shawl for his squaw, a jackknife and a package of violin strings for the crazy boy, Joe, and a piece of red and white cotton print for the papoose. Ageemik would have liked to receive a small keg of rum, but the company did not give or sell spirits to the Indians except where they had to compete with the unregulated American traders.

Ageemik was well pleased with his trade, and as well pleased were McLean and the chief factor. Ageemik always brought in a good load of fine fur, most of it of prime quality and none caught out of season, and he never went deeply into debt with the company.

In the London market Ageemik's load of furs would bring between \$1200 and \$1500, but more than a year would pass before it could reach that market, and another year might pass before the company would sell and ship the same furs to Paris or Leipsic.

Ageemik had never seen money, and would have had no use for it, for no gold or silver

money was used in the Indian trade. The beaver skin took the place of money, and all values and all accounts were reckoned in "beavers."

In this way all the Indians traded over the whole of Rupert's Land. The company set one price for furs and asked one price for its goods. A very good customer or an influential chief might receive a more valuable present, but prices of furs and goods were the same to him as to the small Indian boy who brought in half a dozen muskrat skins.

CHAPTER III

CAMP HUNTERS

BOTH Steve and his father were a good deal surprised to find that some of the August days of Hudson Bay were as hot as the summer days in New York.

Even the pests of civilization were not absent. During the short summer of July and August, even in that high latitude, swarms of mosquitoes, house-flies, cattle-flies and big buzzing horse-flies, or bulldogs, make life in any unscreened room a misery for a white man. The Indians are somewhat used to these pests, but it must be remembered that they always make their summer camps in spots away from swamps, on rocky points exposed to the breeze. Wherever from the Lake of the Woods to Hudson Bay the canoeist sees the tepee poles of the Indians, he may be sure of finding a good camping-ground.

Toward the end of August the nights became cool and frosty, and after a few such nights mosquitoes and flies had disappeared and the really enjoyable season had begun at York Factory. The days were warm and still, a dreamy atmosphere lay over rivers, marsh, and bay, and sleeping under a thick cover of blankets was delightfully refreshing.

On the marshes and in the woods the red cranberries and the yellow swamp-berries were ripe, and Steve gained much favor with the cook as well as with the men by gathering many a quart of them. The Indians had all left by this time, for they were getting ready to go to their winter hunting-grounds, and as there were no other white boys of Steve's age at the fort, the lad was at times a little lonesome.

At the beginning of September the ducks and geese began to fly about on Marsh Point, which is really a vast swamp, stretching into the bay between the mouths of Hayes and Nelson Rivers.

During the last two weeks little had been

28 IN THE GREAT WILD NORTH

seen of the wild ducks and geese, for at this time the old birds moult their big wing-feathers so rapidly that for about two weeks these great travelers of the air lose the power of flight. But now they began to show themselves in the air in flocks of hundreds and thousands, and the great marsh was alive with the quacking of ducks, and the air with the honking of the big gray geese and the rarer cackling call of the white snow-geese, or wavies.

Steve and his father now turned camp hunters. During a few hours' hunting in the morning they procured all the game they could carry home. The men in the mess-hall lived on finely flavored teal, pintails, widgeons, and wild geese, while a large supply of the finest birds was put in the ice house or was smoked and dried for winter use.

But the hunting of Steve and his father and other men made absolutely no impression on the number of geese and ducks. Every day the flocks grew larger, for they were gathering from east, west, and north, preparing to

begin their great autumn flight to the far-off marshes of Missouri, Arkansas, and the Gulf of Mexico.

However, all seasons except winter pass quickly at Hudson Bay. By the beginning of October, ducks and geese had disappeared and marshes and pools were frozen over. Solid ice began to form along the banks of Hayes River, and dark masses of slushy ice glided and swirled seaward in midstream. By the middle of October the river was frozen over solid. Low gray clouds drifted over the fort before a biting wind from the bay. They covered the pale brown grass with glistening snow crystals and sifted them gently through the dark green boughs of spruce and fir. And with the gray clouds and the north wind came, as if they had dropped out of the sky, flocks of beautiful fluffy white snowbirds that flitted fearlessly into the palisade of the fort and picked up the seeds of hay and grain where the draft-oxen of the company had been fed. With sweet soft chirps they called to each other as they flitted and whirled about from

30 IN THE GREAT WILD NORTH

place to place, seeking their food in the seed-heads of dead grasses that still protruded from the snow.

The long Hudson Bay winter had begun.

The laborers were now hard at work cutting wood in the spruce thickets along the river, and the teamsters with their oxen hauled many and many a load into the palisade, for the iron stoves in the different buildings were kept red-hot, and ate up an immense amount of fuel, and the trees on Hayes River only grow to good cord-wood size.

In the offices, the clerks were busy with their accounts and reports, for York Factory was the central depot and shipping-point for the whole Northern Department, including about fifty posts, many of which indeed were simply small outlying frontier posts with few men and little business, but others like Norway House and Red River did an immense amount of business and employed a large number of men.

In the fur houses the packers and sorters were at work packing and appraising thou-

sands and thousands of pelts, from the heavy shaggy buffalo skins of Saskatchewan to the small skins of weasel and muskrat. However, nobody was hurried and pressed for time, because no new business would come in till the Indians returned in June, and the fur-packers even had till August to get ready for shipping the peltries in the four fur houses, for not till then could the annual London ship return to York Factory.

The two men who were almost out of work were McLean, the trader, and old Sam Ferguson, the postmaster. Only occasionally did an old neighborhood Indian straggle into the fort with a few furs, or one of the white men might wish to buy a little tobacco or a pair of moccasins. The postmaster had even less work. It had been a month since he had finished sorting his letters and papers for Red River, for the Saskatchewan, for the distant posts on the Mackenzie River, on the Athabasca, and in the country of the turbulent Blackfeet Indians. Some of this mail was already nearly a year old, and by the time the

32 IN THE GREAT WILD NORTH

newspaper or the answer to an important letter reached the man for whom it was destined, another year would have to elapse. It took sometimes from three to four years before the servants of the Hudson Bay Company at the farthest posts could receive a reply from their friends in the United States, in Canada, or in England, Scotland, or the Orkney Islands. It was a wild and lonely life that these men had to lead.

Steve and his father became more and more intimate companions. With Indian moccasins and on snowshoes they roamed far and wide over the marshes and through the woods of that wild North Country. Often they took their guns along and brought home a brace of ptarmigan, curious wild chickens, which are gray in summer but turn snow-white in winter. Before Steve had become accustomed to discover this pure white game on the background of glistening snow, it happened several times that he aimed at one bird and killed two or three more, which he had not seen. Then David would good-naturedly

chaff him, saying, "Laddie, thee art a great hunter. Thee wilt become famous like Nimrod of the Good Book!" But after a few trips Steve became more skillful in finding game than his father. When the weather was fine Steve looked for the ptarmigans in the open marshes where they were feeding on the buds of willows and other low shrubs, but when it was blustery and snowing he looked for them in sheltered spots along the timber.

However, both Steve and his father soon tired of the sport of ptarmigan-hunting. In the first place, the birds were plentiful and too easy to get, moreover, both the men and the cook were not as thankful for ptarmigan as they had been for the berries Steve used to gather in August.

The cook grumbled and even swore about picking a coopful of Indian hens, and the men objected to eating "snow-hens" very often. Old Ferguson, whenever he happened to pick a wing or a leg a little tough, proclaimed with a loud, rough voice, and argued long and with

34 IN THE GREAT WILD NORTH

a most serious face that the two Nimrods had slipped a pair of tough old snow-owls into the pot.

“Gentlemen,” he would exclaim, “I protest. The company is hunder contract to furnish me with good clean meat. A Henglishman don’t heat howls. Take them to hold Seegush, the ’eathen, ’e’ll heat them. Kill us an ox, McLean; beef his the honly meat for a white man!”

It was all good-natured banter, although Steve at first was quite angry because he thought the gruff old man was in earnest about the owls.

The truth was that the men were quite willing and even glad to eat ptarmigan once or twice a week, but the banter and chaff about owls and fish-ducks and frozen crows helped to relieve the monotony of the long Hudson Bay winter. In fact the men at any fur-trading post were always glad to add to their supplies such fish and game as the country afforded, for the difficulties of travel and the distances between posts were so great

that it was impossible to send in enough food from England. Tea, some flour, salt, butter, salt pork, and perhaps a few hams reached most of the forts.

But these imported foods were luxuries, and the men had to draw the bulk of their supplies from the country. They lived on pemmican and fresh buffalo meat on Red River and on the Saskatchewan, on sturgeon and jackfish at Norway House, and on fish and fresh and smoked geese and ducks at York Factory. At some of the posts, garden vegetables were raised, and these as well as wild fruits were relished as great luxuries.

As the season advanced, the cold increased. When the men returned from their work outdoors, a rim of white frost clung to their fur caps, and their beards looked like huge lumpy icicles. On the river and on the bay the ice was already a yard thick, and the thundering noise from its cracking and crushing reverberated through the still arctic nights.

A peculiar atmosphere of expectancy was

36 IN THE GREAT WILD NORTH

now spreading through the post. The men worked more steadily to finish certain tasks before Christmas, which was only two weeks off, for Christmas was the great day of the year at York Factory, just as it was in old London and New York.

Steve, too, went about with an air of expectancy. Christmas had always been a happy day when his mother was still living. What would it be like with him and his father alone in this wild and lonely country?

CHAPTER IV

CHRISTMAS AT HUDSON BAY

AT last came the day of Christmas Eve, and after the noon meal, the offices, the trading-room, and the fur houses were closed.

For men and boys away from home, Christmas is a day of reminiscences, and with many, a day of sadness and acute silent homesickness.

The afternoon was spent by all the men in tidying up their rooms and houses, an operation always sadly needed but seldom carried out in most bachelor quarters.

After they had finished making themselves and their rooms tidy, the young men wrote letters to friends in Europe and to those stationed at distant posts in Canada, in Alaska, and in Labrador.

Most of the writers expressed the wish and

38 IN THE GREAT WILD NORTH

hope that they might soon see their absent friends and loved ones again, but in their hearts they knew well that only in a few cases would this wish ever be fulfilled. For the Wild North holds her men as in a vise of steel, just as the northern winter grips a continent with its hard hand.

Many a young man who wrote letters home on this Christmas Eve had entered the Hudson Bay service ten or more years before, at the age of fourteen or sixteen. He had now grown into manhood in the service, and felt that going back to Europe or to Canada or the United States would be beginning life all over again. He had learned the fur trade, the character of Indians and half-breeds and of white men in the trade. He had learned to love the free life in the Wild North, but for living in the civilized world he felt instinctively that he had become unfitted.

His pay had gradually risen from one hundred dollars a year, and as he received his housing, food, and working-clothes free, he had a comfortable balance at interest with

the company. If he stayed fourteen years in the service, his pay would be five hundred dollars a year, and he might then be promoted to the position of a chief trader, and later might even become a chief factor.

The chief traders and chief factors really became partners and stockholders in the great company and were known as "wintering partners," and no longer received a stated salary. The chief trader received the profits of one share of stock and the chief factor those of two shares, giving the former an income of about twenty-five hundred dollars and the latter one of about five thousand dollars a year, and food and housing free. These were attractive incomes in a country where one could hardly spend any money even if he were inclined to do so.

It was by such a system of thorough training and deserved promotions of its men that the letters H. B. C. had come to possess, and still possess, a magic spell over their thousands of employees; and by a just and firm treatment in their dealings with the Indians

the great company exercised a still greater influence over one hundred and fifty thousand savages scattered over one third of the continent.

The H. B. C. traders never cheated, never defaulted payment, never lied, never misrepresented their goods. Every man from clerk to chief factor knew and did his duty. A debt owed by an Indian was never forgotten, a crime was never overlooked, and in all the wild forests and swamps and mountains of Rupert's Land there was no place for a criminal to hide. Some Hudson Bay man would find him and bring him to justice.

When Steve awoke on Christmas morning, the fire in the iron stove had gone out and the walls of the log house which he and his father occupied glittered with thousands of ice crystals from the condensed moisture, for during several weeks the thermometer had not risen above twenty degrees below zero, and had often gone down to forty. Only after the old stove had been red-hot for several

hours, did the lace-work of fantastic crystals melt and run down the walls in little trickling streams.

“Father,” Steve suggested, “let’s make a trip to Fish-Duck Pool this morning. The sun is shining and it isn’t very cold. We can easily get back by dinner time.”

Fish-Duck Pool was a place on Hayes River which, on account of springs, remained open two or three weeks longer than the rest of the river and a flock of diving mergansers or fish-ducks always remained here until the water froze up. In his zeal as camp hunter Steve had, about the middle of October, secured half a dozen of these good-looking ducks and had expected great praise for his efforts. But the old gruff postmaster had bawled him out for his trouble.

“Give them to the dogs; don’t try to fool the boys with fish-ducks. They’ll rub your nose in the snow. Those ducks aren’t birds, they’re fish, only they’ve grown feathers to keep themselves warm.”

Steve thought the old man was trying, as

42 IN THE GREAT WILD NORTH

he often tried, to fool him, and he cleaned one and had the cook fix it for him. When supper time came, Steve took one good bite of his duck and then quietly helped himself to a teal.

“They look like ducks,” he thought to himself, “but they surely taste like fish.” After this trial Steve often watched the fish-ducks dive and play in the dark pool, but he wasted no more ammunition on them.

After breakfast Steve at once got ready for the hike with his father. Over the legs of his deerskin trousers he pulled three pairs of heavy socks. His feet were encased in heavy moccasins; over his shirt of caribou skin he donned a leather coat lined with heavy flannel and over his head and ears he pulled a cap of muskrat fur. His hands were protected by heavy mittens which were connected by a string around his shoulders, and a heavy woolen shawl was wrapped around his neck.

Thus equipped they followed the trail made by the wood-choppers to the spruce ridge. It was not a hard-packed trail, for almost

every night it blew enough to fill up the tracks of the preceding day, but the snow was very dry and both Steve and his father had learned to walk with the long, swinging gait of the Cree, when they wandered through the woods and over the marshes of Hudson Bay. The short, erect steps of the white man are suited well enough to European roads and city sidewalks, but they are out of place on the trails and in the woods of a wild country, just as the long, slouching steps of the Indians always looked queer on the wooden walks inside of the palisades of York Factory. So characteristic was the walk of Indians and half-breeds that Steve could recognize these men by their walk a long way off.

There was very little talk as Steve and his father trailed through the lone winter landscape,—they had learned to be good companions without much talk. Nor was there much to be seen on the walk which they had not seen many times. A red squirrel was busy shelling the tiny seeds out of some spruce cones. He did not stop to scold at

44 IN THE GREAT WILD NORTH

the intruders, for it takes a good many spruce seeds to feed even a small red squirrel on a cold arctic day. A sluggish porcupine was clinging to a spruce, like a crow's nest. A white hare crouched in his form near the trail, and, from the top of a dead tree, a big white owl was watching for him, while from a willow thicket a flock of white ptarmigans whirred across the marsh and disappeared in a thicket of young spruce beyond, flying so fast that the owl made no attempt to catch one of them.

Steve wondered why hare and owl and ptarmigan should be white in winter, while porcupine and squirrel wore nearly the same coat winter and summer.

When the boy and his father returned about five o'clock, the mess-hall presented an inviting and festive appearance.

The chief factor, the doctor, the skipper, and several other men were standing in lively conversation around the stove which had been given a new shine in honor of Christmas. The white frost on some of the small panes

had actually melted, a clean white cloth had been spread over the long table, a great argand lamp shed a festive luster over home-made furniture, gaudily painted walls, and large framed engravings. In this out-of-the-way place the hall was indeed a palace of the White Man's good cheer and opulence, of good will and peace on earth.

Now several other men who had been hunting ptarmigans came in, and as the cook peeped in and called, "Dinner is ready!" a most tempting sort of compound odor of various roasts floated through the hall.

"Be seated, be seated, gentlemen!" came from the cheery face of the chief factor. "Doctor, sit down at my right; Mr. Shipper, will you sit at my left? Gentlemen, be seated, and 'Merry Christmas!' to all of us!"

In came on a big platter a most tempting wild goose. Steve thought it was the biggest he had ever seen. The goose was followed by an immense platter of salt pork, and then came a beef roast as big as the cook's boy could carry.

46 IN THE GREAT WILD NORTH

“Ah, a real sirloin roast!” exclaimed the doctor. “Give me a beef roast for an English Christmas. We’ll eat it to the memory of old longhorned Bill, although he was never much good at hauling logs.”

The good cheer and merriment at once became general and a true Hudson Bay appetite did full justice to goose, pork, and beef.

From two decanters of real port and madeira, the glasses were filled, and toasts were drunk, but when the factor proposed the toast to “Absent Friends” a deep solemn silence fell over the hall; for everybody felt that very few of his absent friends he would ever see again in this world.

When the doctor proposed a toast to the ladies, silence again fell over the hall, for the nearest white woman, the wife of the factor at Norway House, lived two hundred and fifty miles away, and most of the company had not seen a white woman for years.

The most exciting part of the celebration came after dinner. It was the annual dance at Bachelors’ Hall, to which every man,

woman, and child, white, half-breed, and Indian for thirty miles around was expected. They had not all been invited because no runner could have found them all, but they were all expected and they all knew it. Christmas at York Factory was the great annual event in the life of all the Indians who dwelt near enough to reach the fort by two days of travel. Their number was not large, not over thirty adults and half as many children.

In Bachelors' Hall the tables had been cleared away, benches and chairs had been arranged along the walls, and rows of tallow candles stuck in sconces along the walls cast the necessary brilliance through the ball-room.

On the benches and chairs sat whites and Indians, while around the stove in the corner squatted a dozen Indian women wearing gaudy cotton print dresses and blankets, with showy big handkerchiefs covering their dark hair. As the chief factor entered, all of them arose with great respect and saluted him in the way white women salute only lovers, husbands, and very near relatives. They then

48 IN THE GREAT WILD NORTH

went the round of the white gentlemen. Some of the younger men quaked a little at this unusual beginning of the dance, while Steve disappeared and remained hidden until this part of the celebration was over. But it was all done so innocently and seriously and when the Indian women had to pass by the tall old doctor they looked so disappointed that all the young men submitted as gracefully as they could. For it was an old custom that on this one day the Indian women thus showed their respect to the white gentlemen of the Company, that did so much to make their hard life a little easier.

And then the dance began. Baptiste played the violin with a will, and Ageemik's crazy Joe beat the kettle-drum with much vigor and perseverance. Young and old, red and white, all joined in the Scotch reels and a few other old dances. To the few men who ever had taken a white girl to a dance, the Indian women looked almost grotesque, as they went through every dance with intensely grave faces and heavy, swinging movements.

But they enjoyed it immensely, and the fiddler and the drummer were given no rest.

At eleven o'clock the musicians stopped. Tables were moved into the middle of the room and covered with clean white towels. On the tables were set platters with cold roast caribou, an enormous kettle of hot black tea, and then the cook added bread, butter, and sugar, luxuries which excited the palate of every Indian present.

The big tea-kettle was soon empty and what little food was left over the women carried away in their handkerchiefs, for according to Indian etiquette a guest must not leave any food served him, and if he cannot eat it all, he must carry the remainder away with him.

The cook at York Factory once put this Indian rule of etiquette to a severe test, and the result became one of those stories which haunt a man through the rest of his life.

Old chief, Naginno, the grandfather and great-grandfather of many of the Hudson Bay Crees, had, through many years' acquaintance become a friend of the cook.

Naginno always brought some choice fur as a present for the cook, and the cook always served Naginno with a meal of white man's delicacies, which means that Naginno was served with anything the cook happened to have on hand and, that Naginno ate and ate until he couldn't eat any more.

Naginno's appetite was prodigious and was the subject of much humorous talk and banter. The clerks of Bachelors' Hall drew up a mock petition to the Governor of the Company in London in which it was set forth that a certain Joseph Elison, for many years cook to the Honorable Hudson Bay Company at York Factory, had conspired with a certain destructive monster of the swamps called Naginno, that the said Naginno was now rapidly eating the Honorable Company into bankruptcy. That the said Elison had violated his trust by turning Naginno loose on the supplies of the Company, and that as a result the servants of the Company would soon be in a condition of starvation and would have nothing left to eat but boiled rawhides and moccasins.

This petition was duly signed and sealed and, in the presence of the cook, delivered to the captain of the returning ship. The captain took the petition with a grave face, and the whole affair had been carried through with such unbroken mock gravity that Elison was not quite sure in his mind whether the whole thing was simply one of those numerous hoaxes and practical jokes which ever emanated from Bachelors' Hall or whether the "Young Gentlemen" really rebelled against his occasionally filling up a poor and hungry old Indian.

He decided that the petition was just a joke and decided to turn the joke on his friend Naginno.

The next time Naginno called he was served with bean soup. This soup was a little bit burnt and the cook was afraid to serve it to his white boarders. A loaf of bread went with the bean soup.

Naginno, having made short work of the loaf, continued his battle against the soup; but the case was hopeless. The big kettle

52 IN THE GREAT WILD NORTH

held not a quart or two quarts or a gallon, it held three gallons. When, at last, Naginno was hopelessly filled, the kettle was still half full, and Naginno knew it was a little game put up to catch him.

He carried the kettle outdoors where the temperature was forty below. Then he went in and talked for half an hour to the cook. At the end of that time he went out through the eating room as if to eat some more soup. By this time the soup was frozen solid. With quick sharp blows of his hatchet Naginno cut the soup out of the kettle, gathered the pieces into his blanket and silently vanished along the trail, his old wrinkled face grinning and chuckling because he had played a "big joke on cook."

He had played a big joke on the cook and in his hurry to get away without being caught at the game, he had cut many dents and a hole or two into the cook's kettle. One of the young clerks, however, had watched old Naginno at the game and he showed the

dented kettle around in Bachelors' Hall before five young fellows took it to the kitchen.

For a week there was no peace for Elison. Several near-fights grew out of the affair, the cook swore with many an oath that if the bunch didn't let up on this gagging he'd leave the whole miserable bunch and walk it to Oxford House and they could all eat their grub raw.

At this juncture the factor interfered and told the boys to drop the bean soup, and after that only the factor and the doctor had the privilege of ever alluding to the story.

It grew to be the custom, however, that every green apprentice sent over from England was in some way induced to ask the cook why Indians didn't eat beans or some such question and that as an answer the big cook grabbed the callow apprentice by the neck and threw him sprawling into a bank of soft snow. And it came to be an understood fact in Bachelors' Hall that this performance was the cook's share in initiating each ap-

54 IN THE GREAT WILD NORTH

prentice into the great fraternity of the H. B. C., for the cook was in reality a jovial, big-hearted man, more than willing to do his share in relieving the monotony of the long Hudson Bay winters.

The two youngest apprentices, the last to act in this initiation ceremony very nearly induced Steve to mention the dangerous subject to the cook. Fortunately, however, Steve asked his father before he went to the cook, for he had been caught on several gags, and David McLean told him the story of old Naginno and the dented kettle.

Old Naginno himself never alluded to the incident, and the cook observed the same silence to Naginno. When the doctor asked Naginno about the dented kettle, the sad and wrinkled face of the old Cree lighted up by a scarcely perceptible smile and his dark eyes flashed for just a moment as he replied: "Yes, I eat a plenty good soup; beans much good soup!"

As long as he lived, he continued to bring

CHRISTMAS AT HUDSON BAY 55

presents of choice fur, game, or fish to the cook, and the cook always set out a meal for his friend, but an unmanageable quantity of soup was never again placed before Naginno.

CHAPTER V

A COLD SWIM

ON the morning after Christmas the Indians all left the fort, some going in this direction and some in that to their widely scattered winter camps. The mothers carried their babies on their backs, some of the younger children rode on the sleighs behind hungry-looking dogs, while the men and young women trudged wearily through the great wintry solitude, most of them living over in their minds the exciting time and the great feast they had enjoyed at Bachelors' Hall, and dreaming of the long warm days of June when they would all return to York Factory with their furs, when they would once more indulge in the joy of trading in the store and visit a few days with their friends. Until then nothing of interest would happen in their lives unless they

should get sick or starve, for hunting, trapping, and fishing had no romance for them.

The Hudson Bay country harbors quite a large number of different kinds of game and fur-bearing animals, but nowhere was it ever such a hunters' paradise as the buffalo country of the Blackfeet, the moose country of the Chippewa, or the deer country of the Sioux in Minnesota.

The hunters of a large Sioux camp at Shakopee in the winter of 1841 to 1842 killed about two thousand white-tailed deer, sixty elk, many bears, several buffaloes and six panthers besides a large quantity of small game and prairie chickens.

The Cree country between Hudson Bay and Lake Winnipeg never offered such hunting-grounds. The game was widely scattered over an immense area of great swamps and rather barren ridges of jack-pine, spruce, birch, and poplar, and where the game was scarce the Indian hunters and trappers had to disperse over a wide area.

At the fort, too, life seemed lonesome after

the red guests had left. Old Jim Seegush and his squaw lingered a few days at the fort, for his camp was only a few miles away on the western edge of Marsh Point. Jim Seegush, although he had been given a white man's name, was a full-blooded Cree. Sometimes when he was badly in need of tea or tobacco he worked a few days at the fort, but most of the time he practised the simple life and managed to pull through from year to year with surprisingly little work, and a little hunting and trapping.

On New Year's Day, Steve and his father walked down the river and out on the bay and nearly lost their lives by one of those unforeseeable accidents that always lurk in the Wild North like treacherous beasts of prey. At four o'clock it grew dark, and a wonderful display of northern lights shot up over the bay, until the flickering whitish rays seemed to unite above the heads of the two wanderers. Steve even claimed that he could hear a fine crackling in the air. A gentle but very cold wind had been blowing all day from

the south. The wonderful display of the aurora caused them to loiter out on the ice longer than they had intended, and when they finally approached the shore they suddenly saw themselves cut off from land by a lane of open water which reached east and west as far as they could see. It was only some thirty feet wide, but too wide to cross even on a running jump. They ran east and west for some distance, hoping to find a narrower place, but no such place was to be seen and before a south wind and an outgoing tide the line was slowly widening. There was no time for thinking it over, for a few minutes' delay has added the name of many a north-land traveler to the long list of those that never came back.

“We must swim for it, laddie!” David said; “nothing else to do. If we don’t we’ll drift out to sea and be caught in a storm. You wait a wee bit till I am over.”

He tossed his long stick across and plunged into the dark ice-water. With a few strokes he was across.

“Now come, boy!” he cried, and Steve shot out from the ice. His father held out his long stick and pulled the lad up beside him. It was all over in less than a minute, but some of the cold water ran down on their bodies and legs and settled in their moccasins.

They squeezed their mittens as dry as possible, but it was impossible to take off their socks and moccasins, and their coats and trousers were almost immediately frozen as stiff as boards.

They helped each other to break the stiffness at the knees and hip joints as much as possible, and then they started on the long trip home, for York Factory lay six miles up Hayes River.

Soon Steve complained that his feet were so numb that he could not feel them at all. It flashed through his father's mind that perhaps the boy's feet would freeze and then he would be crippled for life. Could they stop and gather enough wood for a fire to dry their socks and moccasins? They had no ax and nothing but willow bushes grew on Marsh



"NOW COME, BOY!" HE CRIED. — *Page 60.*

Point. Should they strike out for the camp of old Jim Seegush? It was two miles nearer, but the going across the marsh and through the willow brush was much worse than the traveling on the river.

No, it was impossible. They could not build a fire and they could not reach old Jim's camp. If they stopped moving they would surely freeze their feet and might be caught in a storm, for the northern lights generally indicate the approach of one. They must make a dash for home; it was their only chance.

They pushed ahead as fast as they could, although their frozen clothes made walking fearfully fatiguing. At the end of the third mile Steve fell headlong into the snow.

"Father, I can't move my legs any more; they feel so awfully sore all over and I can't feel my feet at all!" he cried.

McLean picked up the boy, placed him on his back and stumbled along as fast as he could.

"Put your arms around my neck, laddie,"

he directed anxiously. "We must get home. If we stop, we'll freeze our feet."

At the end of a quarter of a mile he set the boy down. "Now you must walk again!" he said. "Come, take my hand! See, there are the lights of the fort. Just swing your legs and keep going!"

Again the lad fell exhausted and again his father carried him a short distance.

At last they reached their cabin, just as the strong, wiry McLean began to feel faint and unable to control his legs any longer.

With great difficulty the few glowing coals in the ashes were made to start a blazing fire of crackling tamarack logs.

With his hunting knife McLean cut moccasins and socks off the boy's feet. Thank God! They were not frozen, but they were almost white, without feeling, and as cold as ice. In another half-hour they would have been frozen, but by rubbing them with a cold, wet towel, David coaxed the red current of life back into them.

When father and son had both donned dry

clothing they ran over to the cook, who was glad to furnish them a kettle of hot tea with sugar and a breast of roast goose for supper and promised not to tell for a while of their mishap and narrow escape.

The next morning one of the worst snowstorms of the season was roaring over the bay and the country.

“Boy, boy,” remarked David, “we’d have frozen to death if we’d been caught in this. I knew the fine northern lights meant a storm. It was good we plunged in. The men could not have looked for us in this storm.”

CHAPTER VI

THE GOING OF THE RIVER

AFTER New Year's there was but little break in the monotony of the arctic winter. There was much cold weather and still colder weather with many days of icy blasts from the frozen bay, until it seemed as if neither bird, beast, nor tree could live.

But northern animals are adapted to survive the hardships of a severe winter. The northern hares are clothed in dense white fur and, with their padded feet, skim lightly over the frozen snow, while every young tree, bush, or shrub is food for them. The several kinds of wood and meadow mice hunt under the snow-drifts. Their keen noses scent and their sharp teeth cut and grind anything that can serve as food, from wild seeds to bark and bulbs. Where hares and mice change

seeds, bark, and brush into flesh, there fox and lynx, mink, weasel, and owl can eke out a living. In their frozen castles the beavers eat the bark from pickled poplar and willow sticks, and their little brothers, the muskrats, dive from their houses into the water and dig the roots and bulbs under the safe cover of the ice. Bear, skunk, and woodchuck survive by still another plan; they sleep away the time when snow and ice lock up their food, while the powerful moose and woodland caribou defy both cold and deep snows, and browse on the trees of the forests and on the beards of lichens that hang from their boughs. Musk-oxen and barren-ground caribou even look with contempt upon the woods south of Hudson Bay; they grow fat on the reindeer moss of the great treeless tundras and rocky wastes; the wooded country is too summery for them.

Thus are the wild folk wonderfully made to battle and win against the grim northern winter.

It must not be supposed that Steve and

66 IN THE GREAT WILD NORTH

his father, although they were keenly looking forward to the first spring thaw and the days when the big ice-floes would grind and crush and push down the river, did not know what to do with the seven days of the week. The short days and the long nights went fast for them.

David McLean had some work to do at the store. On some days he helped to cut wood, on others he worked with the men in the fur houses, and there never was a place, except a modern city flat, that could not find work for an active boy. It was Steve's regular duty to fill the wood-box and carry out the ashes, and the old iron stove was insatiable in the consumption of wood.

The only days which were days of luxurious companionship between father and son were Sundays and those stormy days when the roar of a piercing wind and the flying, swirling snow crystals made outdoor work impossible. On those days they read and talked of so many interesting things that Steve often wished for still more storms than

the frozen bay sent down upon them. The factory had a good collection of books and Steve thought his father could tell better stories and knew more history than any other man at the factory.

When they tired of talking and reading there were many other things to be done. Axes, saws, and other tools had to be sharpened and repaired, guns needed cleaning, fishing-tackle had to be looked over, snowshoes and sleighs had to be made, canoes needed patching, and, of course, Steve and his father had to be their own tailors.

The days rapidly increased in length, and about the first of April the snow showed the first signs of thawing. Of course it froze again at night and became so hard that men and beasts could pass over it as if it had been solid rock.

Not before the middle of May did it begin to melt in earnest. Until then the contest between winter and summer had been a drawn battle. Thaws had been followed by hard

frosts, and even by snow-storms. But now several warm days succeeded one another. Streams and rivulets gurgled and trickled everywhere over the banks into the river. From high open ground the snow vanished as if by magic, and a strong current ran seaward on the ice of the river.

On the fifteenth of May, just as the men were finishing their dinner, the call came: "The river is going!" In a moment the mess-room was deserted and every man in the fort was rushing to the gate to see the great spectacle which marks on all northern rivers the end of a long, hard winter and the beginning of a short, hot summer,—the going of the ice.

It was indeed a grand dramatic spectacle! The majestic river, more than a mile wide, appeared like a huge stretch of jagged, crushing, crunching, pushing, and crashing blocks of ice.

With an invisible but irresistible titanic force the huge blocks and floes, two yards

thick, crowded each other seaward as if they had been suddenly endowed with life. Small blocks caught between larger ones were dashed to pieces and ground into slush. Some blocks grounded in shallow water, and those behind them rose up on end, piled up into huge masses and fell over with a deafening crash, like panic-stricken monsters who would not be stopped.

An apprentice with a passion for showing-off ventured out on the whirling blocks, but warning shouts from the men called him back, and the factor swore he'd send the fellow back to England in irons if he showed off any more fool heroics.

"Wait until you have to risk your worthless bones for the Company!" he shouted, as he ordered him back into the palisade.

Within an hour the spectacle changed. A huge ice wall had formed below the fort, and the water was rising fast. It overflowed the bank, crept through the palisade, and for nearly a week one could go from one build-

70 IN THE GREAT WILD NORTH

ing to another only on the wooden walks, and Steve saw why all the buildings were raised on posts above the ground.

At last the ever coming, coming flood disintegrated the ice wall, and cut a wide breach through it. With hissing, seething, and grinding the whole mass began to move again, and in the morning the mighty stream ran clear of ice, only numerous stranded blocks piled house-high on islands and banks and in the marsh, still told of the great annual drama which had just passed by.

The river was open; summer had begun.

Within a week the marshes and swamps awoke as if by the call of magic. Millions of frogs uttered their shrill croak day and night. Great flocks of ducks traveled hither and thither on whistling wings, V-shaped lines of honking geese, miles long, came sailing down the river, and the musical cry of thousands of snipe and plover enlivened the great marsh.

Then tender green leaves began to burst the buds on trees and bushes, the roots of

which draw nourishment from a soil that never thaws more than a foot or two.

All over the great wilds of Rupert's Land the drama of the rivers was enacted. The Nelson and the Churchill pushed and carried into Hudson Bay even greater masses of ice than Hayes River. The great MacKenzie pushed its frigid loads directly into the Arctic Ocean, and the majestic Yukon carries seaward into the Pacific a vaster load, and builds up an ice wall on its great bar, vaster than any other of the great northern rivers.

At York Factory all was activity now. The Indians would soon come with their furs, and all over the vast extent of Rupert's Land the H. B. C. brigades were preparing to start on their long, dangerous journeys over rivers, lakes, and rapids, to carry the furs of twenty thousand Indian trappers toward the great markets of civilization so that the white ladies of the big cities might clothe and adorn themselves with the furs which the Indian trapper had collected in the unknown and uncharted wilderness. And in turn the H. B. C.

72 IN THE GREAT WILD NORTH

canoes would carry the products of English and other European shops and looms to the remotest tribes of forest and mountains.

Thus commerce has ever since the days of Thebes and Sidon and Carthage linked together the ends of the earth, and the nations that dwell on opposite sides of the world.

CHAPTER VII

THE LAST GREAT HUNT ON THE MARSH

STEVE and his father were the busiest of all the people at York Factory. McLean was now quite anxious to start on the journey to Red River, where he expected to meet again all his boyhood friends from Kildonan, and where he hoped to acquire and cultivate his own land in a region about the fertility of which he had heard such wonderful stories.

“Lad,” he often said to Steve, “if half of it is true, we’ll have a better farm than all the lairds of Scotland.”

Old Wahita, a well known Cree hunter and trapper, who wished very much to visit his daughter and relatives at Red River, had been engaged as guide. He had been over the route only once, years ago, but an Indian remembers a trail a long time, and Wahita not

74 IN THE GREAT WILD NORTH

only had the reputation of being a very reliable guide but also was considered one of the best woodsmen and most resourceful hunters in the whole York district.

But Steve had made his father promise that before they started for Red River they would have one more hunt together on the Great Marsh.

The lad was awake early on the morning they were to start their great hunt, but several robins were already singing cheerily from the palisades of the fort and Steve called excitedly to his father:

“Oh, Father! Listen to the robins! They’ve come back, too! They sing just like they did in New York State.”

Our dooryard friends, the robins, nest as far north as trees will grow, and even farther, and for some reason prefer to live near the trading-posts, where the Cree children welcome them as eagerly as the white children welcome them a thousand miles farther south.

The June morning was indeed as fine as

one may experience in New England, New York, or Minnesota. The air was still and filled with the smell of earth and buds and young leaves, while from bushes and stunted trees came the joyous song of white-crowned and white-throated sparrows and the sweet clear whistle of the fox-sparrow, the king of our native sparrows, together with songs and calls of several small warblers, the names of which Steve and his father had not learned.

It did not take them long to run down to the marsh with the current, and Steve could hardly sit still when he saw large flocks of pintails, teal, and other ducks circle over the marsh. A long, dark line of honking geese passed right over them and Steve was going to fire at them, but his father said:

“No use, boy. They’re a mile high; you couldn’t touch them with a cannon.”

After following a channel in the marsh for a mile or more they pulled their canoe on land and concealed themselves in some willow-bushes near open water.

They felt quite sure that they would get

76 IN THE GREAT WILD NORTH

plenty of ducks, but they wanted some geese; and wild geese, as every hunter knows, are much more difficult to approach than ducks. Having no decoys which they might set out to attract the geese, they tried another stratagem,—they honked like geese.

Many water birds, including wild geese, utter calls which can be heard for great distances, so when Steve and his father saw one of the wavy lines of the big gray geese in the distance, they began vigorously to imitate their cries as well as they could.

The hunters themselves had not much confidence in their ability to deceive the geese, but to their surprise the great line began to swerve and circle over the willow-bushes, the birds evidently trying to discover their supposed comrades that had found a good, safe feeding-ground. Nearer and nearer they sailed, their great wings spread out four feet wide against the sky. When they discovered their mistake there was a thunderous beating and flapping of wings in their efforts to escape by rising again high into the air. Four

of the big birds the hunters brought down. Two fell with a splash into the water, but the other two glided away for a quarter of a mile, and the hunters had to pursue them before they could be captured.

During the day father and son bagged more than forty ducks. Some they secured as the birds were flying low over the marsh; others they flushed from pools and water-holes and then brought them down as they rose, but before they had time to gather speed for a straight swift course. There was no danger of the two hunters securing more than they could use, for during the month just ahead, the cooks at York Factory would feed more men than many a city hotel, and men whose appetites would have quickly eaten the keeper of a city boarding-house into bankruptcy.

As this was to be their last hunt on the marsh, father and son decided to eat their supper in the tepee of old Jim Seegush and bid him farewell before they started on their long journey to Red River.

78 IN THE GREAT WILD NORTH

After a hard tramp of about three miles, they arrived at the tepee of Indian Jim. The tepee was filled with a pungent smoke, for Jim's squaw had a kettle boiling on the fire and both he and his squaw were puffing their pipes filled with a mixture of tobacco and bark of kinnikinnick. Old Jim quite often had nothing to eat in his camp and sometimes he was without tea, but he was never out of tobacco.

In the squaw's pot were boiling several ptarmigans and a large white owl, which, having been skinned, looked very much like a cat. The two white hunters decided by a silent understanding that they would rather not eat supper with Jim and his squaw. They gave a big goose to Jim, and Jim's squaw offered the tired hunters a kettleful of hot black tea, which they were very glad to accept.

Old Jim observed with a grin that the two hunters had noticed the white owl in the pot and he remarked:

“Ducks plenty, but I'm old man, can't hunt

much," and then added in a real cockney accent: "'ave to heat the howl."

McLean told him that he and his boy, Steve, would soon start on a long journey to Red River and might never come back to York Factory.

Jim knew the Red River country; for when he was a young man, he had, like many Indians in those days, made long journeys on the streams and lakes of the North.

"You go to good country," he said. "Plenty grass. Plenty big buffaloes, get very fat on much grass. Many Indians hunt them. Cree, Chippewa, Sioux, and Blackfeet. Chippewa good men. Blackfeet bad Indians. Fight Cree and Chippewa, fight white men, too! Have horses, plenty ponies, ride them all over," and he waved his right arm around.

"Blackfeet live far west, near big mountains. Shoot buffalo on ponies. Blackfeet catch Wahita long time ago, but Wahita brave man, run away all alone, come back to York Factory, kill two Blackfeet."

The Swampy Crees lived at peace with their Indian neighbors on the south, for those never invaded the great barren swamps and forests of these northernmost Crees. The only people against whom the Crees waged war were the Eskimoes to the north of them.

“Wahita goes with us,” McLean told Indian Jim.

“Good man,” replied Jim, “good man. Take you safe. Old man now, but still good man. Can travel, hunt much, fight, too!”

After they had bade old Jim and his squaw good-by, Steve and his father tramped back a weary three miles to their canoe. The way seemed so much longer and harder now, for they were both tired and hungry and the darkness made the going difficult.

When they arrived at their canoe, they gathered driftwood on the beach and felt happy when, at last, their fire blazed up and shed its ruddy glow over the cold, dark waters of the bay.

Two fat ducks were quickly cleaned and fried on a long wooden spit, and after they

were done their bones were soon picked clean.

“It’s great, Father!” exclaimed Steve. “I always want to hunt with you. Mother used to fry ducks at Thanksgiving and on Christmas, and these were almost as good. I was getting very hungry but I couldn’t have eaten old Jim’s owl. I wanted some hot soup awfully, but I don’t think I could drink owl broth.

“Father, why did the Indian have a trap set on top of a post?”

“That’s the way he catches the owls, Steve. You see he doesn’t have to hunt for them and it doesn’t cost powder and shot to catch them. Owls have the habit of alighting on lone posts and dead trees, so that they can watch for mice and rabbits.”

For a while father and son talked of old Jim and his owls, of their trip to Red River, and of mother whom they had buried in New York.

Very soon both grew sleepy and Steve thought his father did not feel like talking

82 IN THE GREAT WILD NORTH

any more, so they replenished the fire, made a bed of dry grass under their canoe, and rolled up in their blankets.

After midnight the first thunder-storm of the season blew up from the south. The lightning flashed over the wide brown marsh, the thunder crashed near them and rolled away over the bay. Steve never woke, but only crept a little closer to his father, who arose and pushed the boy's feet under the canoe so that the rain would not pour down on the tired lad and awake him from his sound sleep.

CHAPTER VIII

THE GREAT CANOE TRIP WITH WAHITA

THE chorus of white-throats had just begun to whistle their clear "Sow wheat, Peabody, Peabody, Peabody!" when an Indian and two white men pushed off from the landing at York Factory.

The white-throats are the true early birds in the great evergreen forests stretching from Minnesota and New England northward to Hudson Bay and Labrador. Even in the latitude of northern Minnesota the first singers may be heard as early as half-past two. By half-past three the woods ring with the song of the full chorus, and during warm moonlight nights, solitary birds may be heard off and on at all hours of the night.

Wahita sat in the stern, acting as steersman, McLean knelt in the bow, and Steve

used a light paddle from the middle of the birch-bark canoe.

About seven o'clock Wahita steered the boat ashore for breakfast.

"Boy is hungry," he remarked. "We get long hot day."

Wahita traveled after the fashion of the fur brigades, which means that he started at daylight and traveled several hours before breakfast. As soon as the canoe had been carefully lifted on shore—a canoe cannot be pulled over the rocks like a row-boat—Wahita started a fire by means of a flint and steel. Tea was soon ready and a liberal ration of robbiboo was allowed to each man. Robbiboo was a mixture of flour and pemmican boiled together into a thick soup. It was a common dish with the Hudson Bay brigades of those days, because it was very nourishing for its weight and bulk. At the present time the dish of robbiboo is as extinct as the great buffalo herds, from which the old-time pemmican, made of dried buffalo meat and buffalo tallow, was obtained.

After breakfast Wahita allowed himself just time enough to smoke before the three travelers again paddled up the river.

“We have long trip,” he said. “May be we meet much rain. May be we stop two, three days in big wind on Lake Winnipeg.”

Although immense blocks of ice still lay stranded on the islands and along the banks of the river, thousands of small black flies annoyed the travelers, and towards noon the big buzzing horse-flies, or bulldogs, as the men at the Bay called them, became troublesome.

When the sun stood highest, Wahita again stopped and said with a kindly smile, “Boy hungry!”

This midday rest was contrary to the rules of the fur brigades. They never stopped for lunch at noon, but traveled as fast as they could all day, because some of the journeys were so long, and delays and accidents so frequent, that the men had to travel with the greatest speed in order to complete the round trip before lakes and rivers again became covered with ice.

Not only were Steve and his father both hungry, but they were tired, and their knees felt sore and stiff because they were not accustomed to paddling long stretches, Indian fashion, kneeling on a piece of canvas or a handful of brush.

Wahita, noticing how stiff and tired his white companions were, remarked with a laugh: "White man, soft knees, hurt much; Indian, hard knees, no feel 'em."

They ate a light lunch and rested about two hours in the cool shade of some trees on a breezy point where the flies and "bulldogs" were not very bad. Then they paddled again steadily until evening, except that twice Wahita stopped for a few minutes to smoke.

About seven o'clock the Indian began to scan the banks for a good camping-place, and an hour later he steered to an open place where the ground was covered with a soft rug of gray lichens and green mosses.

"Good camp here," he pointed out. "Boy pretty sore, sleep fine on soft bed. Not many mosquitoes, breeze catch them."

A more liberal meal consisting of hot tea, roast duck, biscuit, and salt butter was soon ready and enjoyed with leisure.

After supper Steve piled large pieces of driftwood on the fire while Wahita smoked and gazed at the fire in silence.

Steve was wondering whether the old man was thinking of the Blackfeet, for he looked as if his mind were far away.

"I wish he would tell about them," Steve thought, but Wahita remained silent.

The night was warm, and Steve and his father wondered what would be "many mosquitoes" to Wahita, for the breeze did not seem to carry them away as Wahita had indicated. Both Steve and his father were trying hard to rid themselves of the pests by sitting in the smoke and by flapping their large blue handkerchiefs.

Again Wahita laughed at them, saying: "White men, thin-skinned, mosquitoes like them much. No like Indian very much. No like pipe-smoke.

"We make good trip to-day. May be

thirty miles. May be we make forty to-morrow; may be fifty next day.

"I think we sleep," and with those words the Cree wrapped himself in his blanket and lay down under the upturned canoe.

Steve and his father retired into their tent, which was provided with a sod-cloth and could be pinned mosquito-proof.

"They may not like an Indian very much, but they would eat us up if we didn't have this tent. Only an Indian can sleep with his head under the blanket," observed McLean.

If Wahita was wrong about the mosquitoes, he was right about the soft bed and about the boy being very tired.

White-throats, thrushes and other birds were still singing, and from a distance came the weird, wild calls of owls and loons and the long-drawn-out howl of a wolf, but to Steve neither bird nor beast was of any interest. He had scarcely taken off his clothes and crept under the blanket when he was sound asleep.

Soon after daylight Wahita called: "Onishka, onishka!" which means in English:

“Get up, get up!” and when the two white men emerged from their tent, the Indian had a fire burning and breakfast was ready. It consisted of hot tea and a dish new to the white travelers.

“Richeau very much good,” commented Wahita, as all three sat down to eat; “better than robbiboo.”

Steve and his father found that they did like richeau better than robbiboo. It consisted of pemmican and flour fried together, and it was very rich and not so mushy as robbiboo.

As they traveled up-stream the wild uninhabited country began to look less monotonous. The clay banks grew higher, and in many places deep gullies had been chiseled into them by numerous side-streams.

They passed great landslides, which had slipped into the broad river with the stunted spruces still growing on them. Back from the banks, as far as the eye could see, extended vast swamps covered with a scattered and stunted growth of tamaracks and spruces,

90 IN THE GREAT WILD NORTH

and with a low bushy growth of dwarf-birch, Labrador tea, and crowberry, all growing from a spongy blanket of pale-green peat-moss.

As the three canoeists paddled southward up-stream day after day the character of the streams and the forest gradually changed.

From Hayes River they turned into Steel River and then into Hill River. In this stream navigation became difficult on account of about a dozen foaming and roaring rapids which a canoe cannot ascend, and where canoe and baggage have to be carried over short portages.

On the evening of the fifth day they reached Knee Lake, a body of water forty miles long, and they spent the first Sunday of the trip resting on a beautiful high island in the southern end of the lake.

The three men had now traveled southward two hundred miles, and the trees were here much larger than on Hayes River. Birch and poplar, jack-pine, spruce and balsam grew

in wild profusion, and the summery forest was enlivened by the songs of thrushes, warblers, and native sparrows. Some swallows skimmed over the lake on the waters of which loons, gulls, and many kinds of ducks screamed, quacked, and played.

On Monday evening, having made about two hundred and fifty miles in seven days' travel, they arrived at Oxford House, a Hudson Bay post located on the northern end of Oxford Lake.

Oxford House was then, and is even to this day, the only place inhabited by white men on the great canoe-route between Norway House and York Factory.

As both Steve and his father were tired out by paddling and portaging day after day, they desired to rest a few days and visit with the men at the post.

Wahita did, at first, not take kindly to the idea of resting several days.

"We had fine weather," he argued, "pretty soon rain come. Rain all day. Wind blow all day, all night, may be all next

day. We sit in camp. I smoke all day. White man get mad, swear at bad weather. Do no good, rain all same, blow all same. No travel!"

"But, Wahita," replied McLean, "the boy is tired out. He isn't used to paddling and fighting mosquitoes, and he will not travel without doing his share of paddling."

Wahita smoked a minute in silence. Then he grunted:

"All right. Boy tired. Got skinny. We rest three days."

CHAPTER IX

A HARD STRETCH

SEVERAL parties of North Country canoes had arrived at Oxford House and among them was the Red River brigade which had left Fort Douglas the first week in June and had met with much foul weather and many delays on Lake Winnipeg.

The stories these men told of the Selkirk settlers on Red River were not cheerful. Provisions had again been scarce in the settlement and most of the settlers had again spent a miserable winter with the Indian and half-breed buffalo-hunters on the plains west of Pembina in the United States.

The second war between the United States and England was happily ended, but the very air was full of talk and rumors of war and bloodshed between the two rival fur companies, the Hudson Bay Company and the

Northwest Fur Company of Montreal. In the far north, the Hudson Bay Company had been able to retain a monopoly of the fur trade, but in the border country near the United States the Northwesters had become powerful and aggressive rivals. They considered the new Red River settlement as a move of the enemy, intended to ruin their business, and they had threatened to destroy the isolated, infant colony. What might happen if the armed men of the two rivals should clash, nobody could tell.

On the fourth day Wahita and his companions started southward on Oxford Lake. All three used their paddles with renewed vigor. On the second day when they were traveling over a route of small ponds and channels with marshy shores, Wahita landed, and, pointing to a dark trail over the peat bog, said, "Caribou! Cross here this morning. We get one."

A white man turns hunter from time to time, an Indian is a born hunter and is always hunting. It was as natural for Wahita to

notice the tracks of wild animals as it was for him to breathe.

He had seen many tracks along the route, wolf and bear, lynx and otter, and caribou, but of the caribou he had always remarked: "Too old. Caribou far away! Travel all time."

But now he was as alert as a setter that has struck fresh trails of grouse.

"Just gone a little while," he observed, as he seized his gun and followed the trail. "May be we catch them eating moss on tamarack on big bog."

Without saying any more he tested the direction of the wind and began to make a detour around the bog to head them off.

"You make no noise," he cautioned, as he saw that Steve and his father were following. "Caribou has sharp ears, fine nose, too. May be we fool them."

About a mile from the place where they had crossed the stream he headed off a band of six and killed a yearling buck.

Within less than an hour a framework of

poles had been erected, the buck had been dressed, and the meat was being smoked and cooked over a slow fire.

While the meat was being cured, Wahita sat in the shade and smoked. "Caribou very much good," he chuckled. "Much better than robbiboo, much better than white man's salt pig-meat."

During the next two days the travelers had to paddle, push, and drag the canoe over many miles of swift water, and had to make several long portages, the worst part of the trip being the seven-mile gorge of Hell Gate. All three were glad, when on the evening of the fourth day out from Oxford House, they carried their canoe and baggage across the divide at Painted Stone and made camp on the westward flowing part of the Echimamish River.

"He flow both ways," said Wahita, pointing down the sluggish brown current of the Echimamish, which wound placidly along among low banks that were covered with spruce, tamarack, and willows.

“He is good river,” the Indian continued. “Just one more portage. We paddle all way quick to Red River if big wind don’t catch us on big lake.”

For canoeing the Echimamish proved indeed a good river as Wahita had stated. No longer did the travelers come to one boiling, roaring rapid after another; the placid brown current swung peacefully this way and that through the great summer marsh, past picturesque jungles of cattails and rushes that were alive with blackbirds and other feathered songsters, but the mosquitoes were not peaceful. Nowhere else on the whole route had the bloodthirsty swarms been so thick and relentless. Nowhere along the whole stream was there a breezy point or rock for a short respite. Each canoeist in turn hastily ate a bite of lunch while the other two kept the canoe moving, for the minute the craft stopped going, the pests became unbearable.

Great was the joy of the travelers, when late in the afternoon, the birch bark shot into Playgreen Lake, and when, towards evening

they at last reached the important post of Norway House, with its many commodious buildings.

However, their joy was soon turned into consternation, for the post was crowded, not only with voyageurs from the Saskatchewan, but with refugees from Red River. The dreaded blow had fallen. There was no longer any settlement on Red River. On June sixteenth, the H. B. C. people and the Northwesters had clashed in the disastrous encounter known as the Massacre of Seven Oaks, and more than twenty of the H. B. C. men had been killed.

Fort Douglas was in possession of the enemy and the settlers had fled; some of them to Norway House, others to the neighborhood of Toronto in Canada.

McLean was in doubt as to what he should do now. He would not go back to York Factory and spend another winter on Hudson Bay. He could not stay at Norway House, for the post had already more people than it could feed or house.

He decided to go on. If he could not stay at Red River, he would go on to Pembina in the United States. Wahita also was desirous of proceeding.

“I go find my daughter,” he said. “I no see her long time. Never see little papooses. We look out sharp. Camp in woods. Bad men don’t find us. Don’t know we are there. We go on.”

After a good night’s rest, during which no mosquitoes had troubled them, the three companions embarked again, and before the day was done they glided out upon the grand expanse of Lake Winnipeg and made their first lake shore camp on Montreal point. From their camp they could just see the low land of Mossy point to the north, while toward the west the sun sank slowly into the red and orange expanse of Lake Winnipeg, the waters of which stretched westward and southward, vast and endless, with no land in sight, like an ocean.

They had at last reached the Lake of the Big Winds.



CHAPTER X

ON THE LAKE OF THE BIG WINDS

STEVE'S heart quaked a little when Wahita made ready next morning to push the canoe through the low, rolling breakers into a lake that looked as endless as the ocean. Winnipeg was the first really big lake Steve had seen, and the waves that came rolling in endless succession from the west looked as if they might any moment swallow up a thousand small bark canoes, although only a light breeze was blowing. Steve was afraid to think how big they would be in a storm.

"Are there any whales in this lake?" he asked his father, for he had often seen small whales in Hudson Bay.

Wahita smiled at this question. "No, boy," he replied, "no whales in big muddy

lake, only in salt ocean. We catch some fish, may be, and eat him for supper.

“You sit very still,” he added, as he pushed off, and the canoe began to bob up and down as it struck the incoming crests. “No jump! No hand on gunwale. We tip, may be we drown, all three!”

Wahita was cool and skillful with the paddle. The canoe rose on the crests and glided into the troughs and seemed to be picking its own path, so that Steve became quieted and was no longer afraid.

Hour after hour the travelers paddled steadily. About noon they were off Shoal Point and Wahita turned the bow square to the west against the waves.

“You hold him straight,” he said, “I smoke a little. Boy eat a little. Then we go on. May be we camp on Poplar Point, twenty miles south.”

When he had finished smoking, the Indian turned the bow farther from the land, in order to cut off an eastward swing of the shore line. Again they paddled steadily and al-

most in silence for several hours, until a fairly high, wooded point arose far to the southeast. "Poplar Point," murmured Wahita. "Ten miles. Work hard now. I feel big wind coming!"

It was not long before the big wind did come, and with it the waves seemed to double in size almost instantly.

The travelers were running before the wind now and were making good time, but in spite of this the spray began to dash over the stern. "Go fast now," ordered Wahita. "May be we get swamped. Pull hard!"

Neither Steve nor his father needed the order.

Every minute the force of the wind increased; higher and higher rose the seething, white-crested lines. Dark clouds began to rise behind the wooded hills eastward, but as yet a strong westerly wind blew toward them.

"Pull hard!" urged Wahita again. "We get swamped if wind turns. We make shore or drown, all three."

Before wind and waves the canoe shot swiftly shoreward, but not swiftly enough.

A big wave splashed over the stern and then another and another.

“Dip it out, Steve!” cried David McLean, but Steve had already begun, before his father had uttered the few brief words.

Not another word was spoken. McLean and Wahita strained every muscle at the paddles, Steve sat on his knees trying his best to bale out as much water as splashed in over the stern. His arms began to ache and he changed from right to left and from left to right without looking up. The water was gaining on him and they could not keep afloat much longer, but all sense of fear had left him.

The picture of the open lane on Hudson Bay arose in his mind.

“If she fills,” he thought, “we’ll hang on to her and drift ashore. We can all swim.”

A big, foaming breaker washed almost over the heads of all three of them, filling the

canoe, and the next moment the craft came down with a crash on a beach of swirling sand and bowlders.

The three dripping men jumped out. The canoe was full of muddy water, but as they pulled it out of reach of the breakers, and the water ran out of several holes in the bottom, they gave a shout of triumph.

"We're all right, Father!" cried Steve, "this is more fun than swimming in the bay."

Wahita turned the canoe over. "Damned bad lake," he muttered. "I put patches on holes. Make it all right."

It was not long before a big fire was blazing and the tent was set up under the shelter of some low trees.

The "big wind" blew all night and the waves splashed and seethed on shore and bumped the big bowlders against one another, and the wind roared and howled, and the rain came down in torrents.

"Bad lake," said Wahita as he looked over the turbulent waves in the morning. "We stay in camp and dry things."

Steve and his father did not mind the delay, for there was no particular hurry now about their getting to Red River; one week would be as good as another.

Wahita, after he had patched the canoe, sat most of the day smoking his pipe and looking out over the lake.

"A queer fellow an Indian is," remarked McLean to Steve. "I think he can sit all day without batting an eye. He doesn't know what it means to be impatient."

On the second morning the wind had gone down, and after Wahita had walked along the shore a little way, he came back and said:

"We go. Big wind has gone dead."

But the big wind had not really "gone dead"; it had only gone down enough to make traveling possible and the three men had all they could do to creep down the coast another thirty miles. In the evening they were quite glad to run into the sheltered bay of Berens River.

Wahita repeated his terse remark about the bad lake, and all three agreed that they

would stay here and enjoy themselves till the weather became more favorable.

Wahita spent most of his time fishing, while Steve and his father paddled up Berens River to the mouth of the Etomami. On a small tributary of the Etomami they discovered something neither of them had ever seen, a beaver dam, and above the dam in the large pond they found several beaver houses built of poles and mud, as all beaver houses are constructed.

Sitting down quietly on the bank for half an hour they saw their first beaver, that was swimming with his head just above the water and pushing a green poplar pole ahead of him. When he scented or sighted the two intruders he struck the water a mighty blow with his flat tail and dived with a resounding plunge. Twice he reappeared as if to reconnoiter, and each time he disappeared with a slap and a plunge.

In the evening, when the travelers had built a big camp-fire on the bank, Steve begged Wahita to tell him about the wonderful works

of the beaver, and Steve's father also joined in the boy's request.

An Indian is slow in making friends of the whites, for he knows that the whites look upon many of his beliefs as superstitions and make fun of them. But both Steve and his father had treated Wahita with great respect, and after a good supper and two days of rest, the old hunter was in a pleasant talking mood. He laid aside his pipe and said:

"I will tell you what I know about the beaver people. A long time ago, before a white man had seen our forests, the beavers were real people and had a language just like the Crees and the Chippewas and the Blackfeet. They made war against the Indians and threatened to kill them and all their women and children, for the beavers were very numerous everywhere and were brave fighters although they were smaller than the Indians.

"But Manitou did not want all the Indians killed, so he changed the beaver people into animals and took away their language, so

they could no longer hold a council and plan to go on the war-path. But he left a little language in the young beaver children so they can cry when they are hungry. If you sit near a beaver house, when the sun gets down behind the trees, you can often hear the beaver children crying like the papooses in the tepee, and then their parents and big brothers know that it is time to go and cut some boughs from the poplars and bring them to the little people in the lodge, for the little people can eat the leaves and the soft twigs, but their teeth are not strong enough to cut wood."

"How can you see the beaver people?" asked Steve. "Are they not afraid to come out of their houses?"

After a moment's thought, as if he were sounding the motive of Steve's question, Wahita explained:

"I have often seen all the big and little beavers come out of the house and I have heard the beaver children cry when I had climbed a tree and the beavers did not know

that I was there. An animal cannot see or smell a hunter in a tree.

“I think the beavers are animals now, although many Indians think they are still people, but we all know that Manitou has taught them many things which no other animals can learn.

“They can build dams and make a big pond out of a little creek. They remember that once they had hands and arms, and so they dig up mud with their forefeet and pile it across the little streams just like children when they play in the mud after a big rain has made many little streams. If the stream is big, they bring sticks and poles and brush and pile mud against it and make a big dam as long as a hundred canoes and as high as the big tall doctor at York Factory. And when the pond gets bigger, they put more mud and sticks on the dam.”

“What do they do when the rain from a storm breaks their dam?” asked Steve.

“When the water from a big rain breaks the dam or when a hunter cuts it, they come

at night and fix it, for in the daytime they are afraid of the Indians.

“When Manitou took away their stone knives and axes, they begged him and said: ‘We have to cut down trees to get food for our children; give us something that will cut wood.’ So Manitou gave them big sharp teeth and they can cut off chips as big as the Indians can cut off with their hatchets.”

“Can they cut real big trees?” asked the boy.

“Yes, big trees,” answered Wahita. “There are no big trees in our country, but in the Blackfeet country the beavers cut down trees as big around as a man.”

“And what do they do with the trees, Wahita?”

“They cut off the boughs and float them to their lodges and then they eat the bark and they and their children grow fat even in winter when other animals starve. They pickle many poles and much brush in the cold water. Then when the ice covers the ponds they sleep in their lodges, and when they get hungry

they dive out and get a stick just as an Indian takes a piece of meat out of his kettle."

Wahita was silent and lit his pipe, but the boy wanted to hear more of the wonderful beaver people.

"What else did Manitou teach them?" he inquired.

"He taught them many other things because he took away much knowledge from them. He made them forget how to make a fire so they might not come through the forest at night and burn our lodges.

"He took away all their canoes and made them forget how to build them again. When they tried to build new canoes and none of them could remember how to begin, they cried much and said: 'How can we live and escape from our many enemies if we cannot cross the lakes and rivers?'

"Then Manitou took pity on them and said: 'I will make you so that you will not need canoes. Your fur will grow so thick that the cold water will never touch you, and your hind feet shall grow strong for swimming,

112 IN THE GREAT WILD NORTH

and I will give you each a paddle such as no other animal has as far as the sun shines on earth,' and as he spoke, he made all their tails grow flat like a paddle, and it is true to this day that no other animal has a tail like the beaver.

“Then the beavers were very happy and said they were glad that they were no longer the kind of people they used to be and they were glad that they no longer had to hunt for food and tan skins for clothing and no longer had to go to war against the Indians and the Eskimoes.

“They all dived into the water to try their fur, and their strong hind feet, and their new tails. And they found that they could swim very fast both on the surface and under water and could dive quickly and rise quickly, for with their new tails they could steer themselves both right and left and up and down.

“They played a long time and had great fun in the water. They slapped the surface with their tails and dived below with loud plunges.

“And a wise old beaver said: ‘I have discovered a signal. When a beaver sees an Indian or smells a wolf or a lynx or an otter, he shall slap the water with his tail and dive with a plunge. Then his friends will hear him and will all hide from the enemy.’

“Manitou had not thought of this signal, but he let them keep it and since that day the beavers all use and understand the slap-and-plunge signal.

“When the sun began to sink westward and they were still playing, Manitou waved his hand to them and called them.

“‘You must stop playing now,’ he said. ‘You make so much noise that the Indians will come and shoot you with their arrows.’

“Then the beavers again set up a great cry and told Manitou that they had no place to live now, for the Indians and the wolves and lynxes and bears lived everywhere in the forest. ‘You have made us such little people now,’ they said, ‘that we can no longer fight the Indians and the big animal people.’

“Then Manitou placed his hand over his

eyes and sat down on a log and thought a while and then he said:

“ ‘I will give you all the lakes and the ponds and the streams to live on, and you will always remember how to make large still ponds out of little streams. In the lakes and ponds you shall build your safe lodges, but on the large rivers you will dig holes in the bank and your children shall become very numerous from the all-summer lands of palms to the all-winter lands of little sticks.

“ ‘I will give you your little brothers, the muskrats, for company, because the fishes and crabs and turtles who also live in the water are dull and slow-witted people and are not good company.’

“Then Manitou pointed to the lake and clapped his hands three times. The beavers all swam across to an island, where they slept all night, because they were very tired after playing so much and learning so much, and when they woke up in the morning they had forgotten their language, but to this day they remember everything Manitou taught them.

“For you must know that anything which Manitou has taught to a man, bird, or beast is never forgotten, and the children know it without learning it; but anything which Manitou has not taught to man, bird or beast is easily forgotten and the children of each generation have to learn it all over again.”

The fire had burned low and all three sat in silence, listening to the dull rush of the westerly wind over the tree-tops. Suddenly there was a booming slap and plunge, as if a ten-pound rock had been thrown into the river. Steve and his father gave a start, but Wahita smoked unmoved and remarked: “It is a beaver. He heard some of my words, but he has forgotten our language and now he has told his people that we are here by making a big noise in the water.”

“Did Manitou teach the beavers any other things?” Steve asked timidly.

“He did,” answered the old man. “But it is now late and we must sleep. If the wind dies, we must travel to-morrow.”

Steve poured a kettleful of water on the

fire, Wahita stretched out under the canoe, and Steve and his father rolled up in their blankets in the tent.

Three or four times the beaver made his great signal noise, and once Steve could hear the spattering of the drops close to shore; then all became silent except the blowing of the wind over the forest.

CHAPTER XI

TO THE END OF THE BIG LAKE

AT last the wind from the west that had blown steadily for days died down. The wild, grewsome waves that had driven one another day after day and night after night, and had dashed against the eastern shore like great living white-crested batteries and had drowned all sound of human voices with their ceaseless pounding, splashing, and seething, had sunk into gentle swells and ripples which played and babbled on the sand and among the rocks like "a still, small voice."

And as McLean looked over the vast inland sea, with islands large and small rising from it, his thoughts ran back to the wonderful stories told in the book he knew best, and he saw Elijah on Mount Horeb. For had he not, like Elijah, felt the passing of the Lord in a

great, strong wind that broke in pieces the rocks, and had he not watched the waves whose pounding caused the rocks to tremble, and had he not seen the red fire of the western sky? But now there was only the still, small voice on the wild shore. The morning sunlight played amongst the foliage of the primitive forests, and from everywhere came the inspired songs of thanks of the thrushes, warblers and white-throats. It seemed to McLean as if the Good Lord had sent an answer to his silent prayer that he and his only child might not perish in the waters and forests of the wilderness, but might, sometime, again live in a real home, as they did when the boy's mother was still with them.

Wahita and the lad had been loading the canoe and the boy's lusty shout and Wahita's call: "We go now!" roused the father from his reverie.

Once more they were afloat on the big water with the bow pointing southward. It was ideal traveling. To the west they could plainly see Berens Island, while southward

another large island and a number of small ones and Pigeon Point loomed like dark fringes and patches on the clear blue horizon. It seemed impossible that this beautiful summer lake could be so quickly stirred into a destructive uproar.

“We are over bad part of lake,” said Wahita. “Water gets narrow; we go close to land all time. Run to shore quick if wind jumps up.”

In the evening they reached the Narrows and camped on Dog-Head Point, where the lake is scarcely two miles wide. Early next morning they passed Bull-Head Point, the southern end of the Narrows.

South of this point the lake again widens, reaching in places a width of nearly thirty miles. But over a part of the stretch the force of wind and waves is broken by large islands, and nowhere in the southern half does the west wind rush over a sweep of sixty miles of open water, as it does in the northern half.

Wahita could have chosen a safer route by

creeping along the west shore, but that would have made the journey from Norway House to the Narrows twice as long. Moreover, there are very few good camping-grounds on the low western shore, and the mosquitoes would have been even more numerous and bloodthirsty than they were on the sluggish brown waters of the Echimamish. For these reasons the Hudson Bay brigades always followed the route along the east shore and took their chances on foul weather.

On the evening of the third day after they had left Berens River, they made camp on a sandy point at the mouth of Red River, and the great dangerous lake lay behind them.

After supper Steve built a big camp-fire of driftwood, which threw its ruddy glare far over the quiet water, while from the great jungle of rushes and reeds close by came the voices, calls and cries of countless ducks, geese, coots, rails, bitterns, and other water birds, all joining in the never-to-be-forgotten chorus of the summer night, such as Steve and his father had never heard before, a

weird, wonderful grand opera to which are admitted only those who travel our wild northern lakes and rivers in canoes, and sleep in light tents under the canopy of the summer stars.

Silhouetted against the red fire, Wahita sat and smoked. "I see daughter and papooses pretty soon. May be I visit them a long time," he said, breaking a long silence, into which he relapsed, as a smile softened his serious dark features.

"Wahita, tell us the rest about the beavers," Steve ventured to beg.

Again Wahita smiled. "May be, I tell papooses all about the beavers. My father told me a long time ago, when I was smaller than Steve, long before I saw a white man."

"What else did Manitou teach the beavers?" Steve asked, emboldened by the old man's answer.

"I tell you," Wahita began, "what else he taught them.

"He let them remember a little about building lodges, so they can build big tepees of

sticks and mud. They always build them in the water, and the door is under the water, so the wolf and the lynx and the bear can't go in, but the otter can go in because he can swim like the beavers themselves. When all the beavers are at home he is afraid to go in, but when only the little beaver children are at home, he sometimes goes in and carries one away and eats him, but most of the time he catches fish and crayfish."

"Is it true?" asked Steve, "that they have more than one room in their houses?"

"No, the big doctor lies. The beavers had only one room in their tepees when they were people. How can they remember to build more than one room? But it is a big room, so big that a boy can sleep in it.

"It is a good safe house. When the pond freezes, the roof of the house freezes also, and the wolf and the lynx and the okeecoo-haw, the wolverine, cannot break the roof, and Manitou puts the black bears to sleep when the ice comes.

"Manitou also taught the beavers to build

many dams one above the other, so they can make several ponds and can travel by water and cut all their trees close to water, for it is not safe for them to travel far on land. That is the reason they are afraid on land. Even Waboooh, the rabbit, can scare them, although he cannot bite and cannot scratch.

“They can also dig canals from one pond to another so they can travel fast by water all the way, and they also float their poles on the canals.”

“What else do they know?” asked Steve, when he thought Wahita was going to stop.

“One thing more Manitou taught them,” Wahita continued. “They can make a trail which only a beaver and a good Indian hunter can make out. They do not cut trees and do not mark trees on the trail, but they make little things of mud, as the cook at York Factory makes little pies.”

“Oh, mud-pies?” exclaimed Steve.

“Yes, mud-pies,” Wahita confirmed. “They make a trail of little mud-pies. When a big beaver goes away to find new trees he

makes a trail of mud-pies. Not many, but just a few where he has crossed from one water to another. Then, may be, another beaver comes along and finds the mud-pies and smells them and follows the trail and so the big lone beaver gets a mate and they build a house on a new stream, where many poplar trees grow and where their children find much food.

“Now I have told you all the beaver people have learned and all they remember.

“Before the white men came to our country the beavers were much more numerous than the Indians, but since the Hudson Bay Company buys their skins and sells traps to the Indians many thousand beavers are caught every year. I think Manitou did not know about the white people and did not teach the beavers to look out for steel traps and they are not able to learn it. Only the wolf and the fox and the okeecoohaw can learn about steel traps.

“Now I have told you all my father told

me about the beaver people, and all I have learned of them myself.”

The fire had burned down to a heap of dull red coals and the blackbirds with the golden heads and those with the red shoulders had gone to sleep in the rushes and only those water birds whose cry and call may be heard all night, like the loon and the wild ducks and the little marsh-wrens, were still awake.

“We must go and sleep,” admonished Wahita, “for to-morrow we paddle against the current of Red River all day.”

CHAPTER XII

IN THE WAR ZONE

THE trip up-stream past stands of good-sized elms, maples and cottonwoods was most enjoyable, and the feeling that they had safely passed through the dangers of Lake Winnipeg put all three of the travelers in a happy frame of mind.

The charm of river travel, where one looks for something new and unusual as he rounds each bend of the stream, took hold of them.

The Red River, having cut its bed through the almost level soft clay bottom of the former glacial Lake Agassiz, is noted for its winding, curving, serpentine course. Again and again they passed the same point twice, but they never tired of watching the banks for turtles, lazily taking a sun-bath on a log. If the canoe came too close, the ever-watchful creatures plumped precipitately into the water, like so many stones.

Once they surprised a white-tail buck standing in shallow water. At Steve's yell the animal dashed into the timber, where he snorted and stamped till the canoe had passed. The comical antics of a black bear they watched for a time while he crudely practised the art of old Izaak Walton on some shallow rapids. He was in luck, too, for he brought down his heavy paw on several venturesome suckers and devoured them while they were still wriggling.

Another bear they observed making a rich meal on a mess of may-flies which wind and current had thrown up on shore.

"Bear eat everything," Wahita commented; "that's why he grows so big and fat."

Steve never tired of watching the great blue herons that stood like meditating philosophers in shallow water, and rose slowly with a kinked neck, outstretched legs, and laboriously flapping wings.

Another source of interest and amusement to Steve were the ducks that seemed to be giving their broods of varying age and size

lessons in watercraft and woodcraft. The mother ducks showed great alarm and quacked and flapped their wings, acting as if they could neither swim nor dive nor fly. But invariably, after the little ones had dived or hidden on shore, the mother flew gracefully up or down stream.

Steve was so sure that he could catch some of the little ones on shore that Wahita landed and let him try, but although Steve hunted twice ten or fifteen minutes for a brood that he had seen conceal themselves in the weeds, he never even saw a single duckling.

"They sit very still," Wahita remarked, with a laugh at Steve's failure. "You no see them.

"Mother ducks are big liars. Try to fool you. Many birds are liars. Grouse is big liar, night-hawk is big liar.

"Eagle and fish-hawk is no liar. Fly around and scream and tell you where nest is. But it is always in big tree and you cannot climb to it."

On the second day the travelers reached

Fort Douglas, still occupied by the North-westerns.

Their reception was neither hostile nor friendly. McLean called it watchful. They were evidently suspected of being spies of the Hudson Bay Company.

After staying a week near the fort they thought they had convinced the Northwest factor that they were not spies. They had also learned that Wahita's daughter and friends were camping on the Assiniboin about fifty miles westward.

The case of McLean and Steve, however, was bad. David's friend, McGolrick, had been drowned, and all his other friends had gone to Toronto where the Northwest Company had given them land and none of them would come back to Red River.

McLean did not wish to go to Toronto, moreover the Northwest Brigade whose route to Canada lay by way of the Winnipeg River, Lake of the Woods, Rainy River, and Fort Williams, had left a week ago.

He did not wish to return to Hudson Bay.

He did desire very much to go back to the United States. In those days, however, Prairie du Chien in Wisconsin was the nearest white settlement that could be reached from Fort Douglas by way of the Red, Minnesota, and Mississippi Rivers. Fort Snelling had not yet been built.

Steve was more than willing to undertake this six-hundred-mile trip with his father.

"Father, you and I will get there all right," he asserted with boyish confidence. "We have learned a lot about canoeing and camping and hunting and Indians."

However his father's sober reflection could not take the boy's light-hearted view of the enterprise. It was too long and too dangerous a journey for him and Steve alone, and he had no means to hire one or more men, even if men willing to go could have been found.

If they went by themselves, they would be exposed to all the accidents of the long journey. In a party of two, if one man takes sick or is disabled, the other cannot carry

him very far, nor can he leave him and go far for help.

But the greatest obstacle was found in the warring tribes of the Chippewa and Sioux Indians. If he and Steve undertook this long journey alone, they would be entirely at the mercy of any Indians they happened to meet. And they could not hope to complete the trip without falling in with some of them. No, he could not expose his boy and himself to the mercy of these warlike, uncontrolled savages.

But what could he do? Stay with the Northwesters at the fort? They evidently did not want him and he did not wish to stay with them.

He decided to talk it all over with Wahita.

Wahita listened quietly to everything McLean had to say.

"You have spoken well," he began in reply; "you should not go to your country by way of Hudson Bay. The journey is too long and you would have to start back to-morrow or you might miss the big ship for England.

"You must not travel through the coun-

tries of the Sioux and the Chippewas. They are always fighting, they are not peaceful like my people, the Swampy Crees. They might kill the boy, they might kill you, too. You must not go. I cannot go. I am afraid to go. We three could not fight them. They are too many.

“It would be bad to stay here. There are too many bad men in the fort. They drink firewater and talk loud and get angry. When the firewater rises to their heads, the evil thoughts break out of their hearts. They still suspect you. When your eyes are turned away one of them might stab you or shoot you.

“Then your boy would be all orphan, no mother, no father.”

Wahita was silent and moved a little closer to the small camp-fire, for the night was cool, although the season was midsummer.

“I think, my friend,” replied McLean, “you have spoken the truth and your words are wise. But what is the best thing for the

boy and me to do? Tell me, if your mind has thought it out."

"I have thought much of what my friend and the boy should do, and I will tell you all that is in my heart.

"You may go with me up the Assiniboin. My friends will be your friends, and if they have meat, you and the boy will have meat.

"But white men do not like it in an Indian camp all summer and all winter.

"We make much noise. The dogs bark, the papooses cry, the drums beat with a loud noise. We are Indians, you are white men, and sometimes we have no meat, and in the winter our tepees are cold as soon as the fire goes out.

"You need not come to us. You and the boy can find a good hunting-ground. You can make a warm cabin, you can hunt moose and bear and rabbits. You can trap beaver and muskrats and other animals that bear fur.

"When the ice has gone down the rivers and the leaves break out of the buds and the

bright yellow flowers bloom in the marshes I will come back and meet you at the fort.

“Now I have told my sons what was in my heart and I have spoken truthfully and concealed nothing.”

After he had again been silent a while he said that he would like to say something more to his white sons, but it was something he had heard and did not know whether it was true, it was only a rumor and a feeling among the Indians.

Having been assured that his white sons would be happy to hear anything their wise father might wish to say, Wahita explained that there was a report current amongst the Indians near the fort that Lord Selkirk was in Canada and that he would come with soldiers and would take Fort Douglas away from the Northwesters and that all the settlers now at Norway House would come back.

“I do not know if this talk is true,” concluded Wahita. “But I know that two Chippewas are now visiting the Crees near the fort. These Chippewas have come from

Lake Superior by way of the great muskeg route between Lake of the Woods and Red River. This is a short route to Red River, which only the Indians travel, because white men do not like the big swamp.

“These two men who are friends of the Hudson Bay people heard in their country that Lord Selkirk was in Canada.”

After McLean had thought all these matters over carefully he decided to stay at Red River, at least till the following summer. For he felt quite sure that Lord Selkirk, after he had spent so much money, time and work on the settlement, would not give it up without a fight. Nor could he believe that the strong old Hudson Bay Company would surrender without a struggle such an important point as Fort Douglas.

Fort Douglas stood near the junction of the Red and Assiniboin rivers, and in those days commanded the fur trade of a vast region around it, just as the city of Winnipeg to-day is the center of an immense trade in grain, live stock, and general merchandise.

CHAPTER XIII

WITH THE CREES AND BY THEMSELVES

IT was now only the month of July and Steve and his father had at least a month before they needed to think of locating and establishing their winter camp.

They accepted gladly Wahita's invitation to visit with him the small Cree village, where his daughter lived. For a few knives and other things they bought three Indian ponies and started across the plains for the Cree village.

Horseback riding was rather new business to all of them. Wahita told of how he used to ride fast ponies, while he lived among the Blackfeet. "But now," he said, "horse feels lots hard and may be I fall off. I must learn again. Indians all ride horseback on Assiniboin."

McLean and Steve were also poor horse-

men, because the Hudson Bay Company at York Factory no more used horses than did the Swampy Crees in their big woods and swamps.

Both father and son were glad when, after they had ridden about twenty miles, Wahita said: "I think we camp."

Steve said he had never felt so sore in his life and he wished they had gone up the river in a canoe. Their horses were tethered out on ropes, for Wahita told his friends if the horses were left to run free, they would run back to Fort Douglas during the night.

Their camp was made near a small creek on the edge of a poplar grove, which dotted the prairie of that region. As the night was pleasant and there were no mosquitoes, they built a brush lean-to with a good camp-fire in front of it.

McLean and Wahita seemed to fall asleep very soon, but Steve was wakeful. All his bones ached and the prairie around seemed to be alive with howling brutes. There were low howls and high-pitched howls, distant

howls and near-by howls. From time to time the horses snorted, and now some creature came rustling and sniffing around quite close to the camp, and Steve sat up to see what it was, for he felt his hair rising as he thought that a wolf might spring at them. But it was only a badger scurrying about and trying to smell out the sleeping hole of some striped gopher so that he might dig him out and make a meal of him.

Wahita, noticing the boy's restlessness, told him to go to sleep and added: "Wolf and coyote just howl in summer time; don't come near camp and fire. Just like to sing and make noise."

All three were glad when, the next evening, they arrived at the Cree camp, where they were greeted by deafening yelps and barks of some twenty dogs of all colors and pedigrees.

Wahita and his friends were given a tepee by themselves which Wahita's daughter kept in order.

Many new things interested Steve in the

Cree camp. The women were nearly always busy. Some were weaving mats out of strips of cedar bark which they had gathered more than a hundred miles to the east at a camp on Lake of the Woods. Some were tanning skins, others were knitting fish-nets, and some were taking care of their children just as white mothers do.

The men in camp were just sitting around doing nothing, at least so it seemed to Steve; but Wahita told him that the men made long trips after buffalo, elk and other game and that the work about the camp was the duty of the women who would not let the men interfere with it.

Another thing Steve at first did not like was the absence of any time for meals. However, as there was plenty of meat in camp, everybody helped himself from the kettles that were always boiling, and Steve and his father found all the meat they could eat in the kettle of Wahita's daughter.

A boy in the tepee next door was sick, and an Indian medicine man had been called to

cure him. During most of the time for three days and three nights the man kept droning and chanting his songs, which Steve could not understand. At times he fell to stretching the arms of the sick boy and sucking his chest. When he stopped sucking he showed a large splinter of wood which he claimed he had sucked out of the boy's breast. The next day he showed a large black water-beetle, the kind which nowadays sometimes gather at the electric arc-lights. This he also claimed to have sucked out of the boy.

On the third day the medicine man left and took with him a pack of blankets and tanned skins as pay for his services, but the sick boy did not get well. One day his father lifted him up on a pony and rode around the camp several times, as fast as the pony could run. A friend had told the father that he could stir up new life in the boy in that way. But the poor lad grew worse and died a few days later. The Indians wrapped his body carefully in blankets and buffalo skins and tied it

in the limbs of a tree a few miles down the river.

Both father and son were glad, when at the end of four weeks, they turned the heads of their ponies again toward Fort Douglas. They had enjoyed their stay with the Crees, but they had learned that Wahita had told them the truth about an Indian camp. It was indeed a noisy, restless place.

Steve, true to boy nature, had thoroughly enjoyed it. Like a real boy, he had soon learned to lie down and go to sleep in spite of dogs and drums and dancing. However, the treatment of the sick boy lingered even in Steve's mind as a ghastly experience. But McLean declared, "I am too old to learn to live like an Indian."

One thing both father and son had learned during their stay in the Indian Camp: they had both become good horsemen. Steve, especially, could ride any Indian pony that was not a plain, vicious buckner. Both had also

learned to feel at home on the plains and to find places from the directions of Wahita.

Their stay at Fort Douglas was short. They bought some pemmican of the Indians encamped there under Chief Pusick, and a dozen traps they secured of the Northwesters. With guns, powder, shot, balls, and other things McLean had wisely equipped himself at York Factory.

Wahita had told them where to hunt and trap during the winter. "You ride straight toward the morning sun from Fort Douglas," he had told them, "till you come to the end of the land of grass and yellow flowers, which the whites call prairie. After two or, may be three sleeps you come to the sand ridges, where the pines grow, the Cree pines, I call them. They are the same pines that you have seen in my country at Norway House and at Oxford House, the pines that make a big fire and a black smoke, so you will know them when you see them again, although they grow bigger here than they do far north where the winter is so long."

Following these and other instructions Wahita gave them, Steve and his father started east from Fort Douglas on their first long journey all by themselves.

It was surprising how easy it was to follow the directions of the old Cree. When the sun was not shining they looked at the watch that tells you where you are going—Wahita's description of a compass—and took their bearings toward a distant poplar grove or knoll.

They traveled on horseback and had taken one extra pony as a packhorse to carry their outfit.

Steve was as happy as only a boy can be. Often he galloped ahead to be the first to look over the next rise, or he ran a race with a startled coyote. He had forgotten all past troubles and did not think of those ahead.

The prairie at its best will call out the joy of living in any one whose soul is not dead to sunlight, grass, and flowers. And the prairie was at its best now. The endless expanse of soft green was studded with countless dots,

wreaths, splashes, and patches of goldenrods and other wild flowers, while on the dryer stretches the reddish and bluish purple spikes of blazing stars and lead-plants filled in the pattern of the emerald carpet.

To Steve, however, the play and war of birds and animals was even more fascinating than the great scenic canvas of grass, groves, and wild flowers. A pair of coyotes enticed him a mile out of his way, always showing themselves in plain view on a rise of ground against the sky. So excited became Steve that he fired a ball after the coyotes, and when they finally disappeared in the tall grass on the edge of a big slough, Steve did not know at first in what direction the wily beasts had led him.

When he rejoined his father he discovered somewhat to his chagrin that once more some wild creatures had fooled him. The elder McLean was lying at ease in the grass, and pointing to a hole in the ground near them, remarked:

“They fooled thee finely, laddie. Here’s

their den, and the pups are all down in the hole."

In front of the den, in a little depression half as large as an ordinary schoolroom, the grass was trampled down, and several old buffalo bones with many tooth-marks on them, as well as a dead rabbit and gopher, showed that this sunny spot was the outdoor kindergarten of the coyote pups, where they played and gamboled and learned the things a coyote must know to live on the plains not only in summer, the time of ease and plenty, but also in winter when the blizzard roars over the prairie.

Many hawks, small and large, were seen everywhere, sailing overhead or quietly perching on a rock or knoll. And around every perching hawk three or four gophers were sitting up at respectful distances in front of their holes, scolding as loud and as fast as they could.

Steve thought they made a noise as if they were swearing at the hawks in the gopher language.

"I wish," he said, "Wahita were here, so he could tell us what the Indians know about all these animals and birds."

Following Wahita's directions, they traveled across the pine ridges about as many miles as a man has fingers on his hands, till they came to a country where the land is all rock. Here they turned directly north and traveled once more as many miles as a man has fingers on both hands.

"If you keep your eyes wide open," Wahita had concluded, "you will then see a string of little lakes which are tied together by a little river. There you must find a good place to camp and stay all winter. You will find muskrats and beavers and rabbits, and may be a bear and a moose, if you watch for their tracks.

"If you get lost, boy must climb tree and look. I come in spring and camp under big, wide elm I showed you near Red River. If you are not there when white man says, 'It is June,' I come and look for you."

They did not get lost, but the boy climbed

many trees to look, just for the fun of it, for Steve felt himself quite important in helping his father to pick out the route in a wild, unknown country.

CHAPTER XIV

ALONE IN THE FOREST

NEAR a stream flowing into a small lake they found a place which seemed to meet all the requirements of a good camp.

It was near good clear water. There was plenty of wood for fuel, and a thicket of young jack-pine would shelter them against severe northwest storms. No very tall trees, that might attract lightning or might break down in a storm grew close by, but there was an abundance of straight jack-pines and white birches about half a foot in diameter, just the right size for camp-fires, when the evenings would grow cold, as well as for winter use when an abundance of fuel becomes a matter of life and death with settlers and campers in a northern climate.

For campers and Indians in the forest, na-

ture has solved the problem of fuel so that a man only needs an ax to make available the heat which the summer sun has stored in pine and spruce and birch. The frontier settlers on the treeless plains of the United States and Canada, however, had to solve the problem for themselves. They twisted the long, coarse prairie hay into solid ropes, or they burned buffalo chips and cow chips, or dug peat out of the sloughs and lignite out of the hillside.

Man's wild kindred also find their shelter in the forest, and nature has given them a heavy coat of fur instead of the clothing with which man provides himself.

The little dwellers on the open plains, gophers, badgers, and prairie dogs, had to learn to provide their own shelter. They have for ages dug warm burrows into mother earth, long before the Indians of the plains built their sod-houses and the white pioneers excavated their sod-covered dugouts into the hillside. From the small four-footed people of the plains man learned to provide himself

with primitive shelter on the great plains where no tree or bush breaks the sweep of the storms from the great arctic seas and tundras.

For a few days Steve and his father used their horses to explore the high and fairly open country in the neighborhood. A man on horseback cannot travel through dense timber nor over marshy and boggy ground. The foot of the horse has been perfected for traveling over hard and dry ground, but bogs and marshes he instinctively avoids, because he is afraid of being mired, and even the most spirited wild horse, mired in a bog, becomes a helpless prey to the ever-hungry wolves and other flesh-eating beasts.

It soon became plain to both father and son that they could not keep their horses over winter. The forest would, indeed, afford them plenty of shelter, but deep snow would hide all food from them and the wolves would be sure to get them. So they decided to do as Wahita had told them.

“You let ponies come back,” he had advised. “They run with Indian ponies around groves on prairie. May be they die, may be wolves eat them, may be they live and you get them again next summer.”

So they rode them a mile along the trail to Red River, took off the bridles and let them go.

And now both father and son felt that they were actually alone in the solitude of the wild forest, for the horses had been a kind of company to them.

Steve led the life of a happy, care-free boy who lives for to-day and takes no thought of to-morrow, but his father felt the serious responsibility of bringing his son and himself through the winter, a new problem to him, living here many miles away from both whites and Indians.

On one point Wahita had quieted his fears. He had assured McLean that all the Chippewa and Assiniboin Indians were friendly to the whites, against whom they had never waged war. “And the Sioux,” he said,

“will never come to Lake Jessica nor the other lakes near it.

“To come to Lake Jessica they would have to cross the big Lake of the Sandhills and come down the Winnipeg River. When I was at Red River long time ago I heard of Sioux coming down the Red River to the mouth of the Assiniboin and even to Lake Winnipeg, but no Sioux has ever seen the Winnipeg River, which runs with many white leaps over the rocks from the big Lake of the Sandhills to the Lake of the Big Winds.”

The problem of shelter for the winter had to be solved by father and son. They had set up a regular Indian tepee in preference to a white man's tent. There were no mosquitoes during the cool August nights, and on rainy days they kept a fire going inside the tepee, which they could not have done in a tent.

How should they live during the winter? Should they brave the cold in the tepee with plenty of blankets and a fire in the center, or should they build a log cabin or some kind of

a dugout? Steve was for living in the tepee. "If the Indians can do it, we can," was his argument.

"We can do it," his father agreed, "but I fear it would be a cold life when the wind comes down from Hudson Bay. And remember, lad, we have no stove as we had at York Factory."

In the end they agreed to live in the tepee as long as the weather remained pleasant, but to build a dugout for use when the tepee should become too cold.

Any one who has ever camped in the great glacier-planed country which stretches from Lake Winnipeg to Lake Superior, Isle Royale, New England and Labrador, knows that over vast regions of this area one cannot build a dugout without blasting it out of the solid rock. On many otherwise good camping-sites there is not even soil enough to hold a tent-stake.

The only place Steve and his father could find for building a dugout was a ridge of boulders which wind and ice had shoved up on

shore when, years ago, the lake stood at a higher level. Such boulder ridges may be found on nearly all lakes of any size in North America, but to Steve and his father their origin was a puzzle, for in those days the work of ice and wind was not well understood, and it was not even suspected that a long time ago a large part of North America was covered by a vast sheet of ice resembling the great masses of ice that now cover Greenland and the antarctic continent. From the work of this great ice sheet resulted the thousands of lakes on which we fish, hunt, sail, and skate at the present time. But this was something Steve and his father could not know, nor did Wahita know it. To him Manitou had made the earth as it now is, only some regions he had made a good country and others a poor country for the Indians to live in.

Building a dugout in a ridge of boulders was no easy work, but Steve and his father went at it with the same spirit that boys build a shack. With stout poles they pried loose

the bowlders big and small. Most of the stones they could throw out by hand, but some were so big that they had to roll them out by using their poles as levers.

Modern trappers generally carry a folding sheet-iron stove and iron pipes to their camps, but there was no stove in McLean's outfit, so they had to build a fireplace and flue as best they could. The hardest part to make was the flue or chimney. To build this they stood a big dry pole on end and piled stones and clay around it. By using stones that would not fall out and by taking care that the pole did not stick, they built a flue which looked as if it might really work.

The roof was the next part to be built. They had planned to make it out of cedar bark, but found that the season was so far advanced that the cedars would not peel, so they used poles, sod, and marsh-grass instead. As they had no tools but their hunting-knives for cutting grass and sod, building the roof was also hard work.

"We must make a good job of it," McLean

156 IN THE GREAT WILD NORTH

admonished when Steve grew tired of the work. "If we don't, rain and snow-water will drive us out when we most desire to stay in," he added, good-naturedly.

Of course the cave, as Steve called the place, had no window. The door consisted of a piece of tarpaulin tied to heavy sticks, and when it was set in place, the cave was dark, except for a little light which fell down the smoke flue.

At last the cave was finished, and now came the great moment of trying the flue. Would it draw, or would it smoke?

Steve carried in some live coals and dry sticks which he blew into a flame, and the curling smoke spread at once through the cave.

"It won't work, Father," he exclaimed, much disgusted. "It will smoke us out!"

But his father told him to put on some more dry wood and to open the door. "Get a draft through the door and let the flue get warm, and may be it will work," he said, and it soon

worked so well that a blaze went clear up the flue.

Steve gave a shout, turned a somersault in the cave and cried: "Now we're all right, Father! If it gets awfully cold, as at Hudson Bay, we can crawl into the cave and build a fire and you can tell me stories all day."

It was now past the middle of August, and both Steve and his father had worked or traveled hard every day since they had arrived at Lake Jessica.

In order to conserve their small stock of flour, beans, peas, and bacon, they had been compelled to catch enough fish and rabbits and other small game to supply their daily needs. Steve had also collected and dried quite a supply of blueberries, which grew sweet and large in the exposed rocky depressions around the lakes, as well as in some open swamps.

When Steve came home with a kettleful of the sweet big berries, his fingers and mouth

dyed with the purplish juice of the wild fruit, father and son agreed that Wahita was right in his enthusiastic praise of menahga, the blueberry.

“Blueberries were the last fruit Manitou made,” he had told them, “and they are the best. All the wild cherries have a big stone and only a little meat; they are very good only for the birds. The strawberries and the raspberries are very good, but Manitou forgot to give them a place that is their own. So they can only grow where a fire has killed the forest, but after a few summers the bushes and trees always come back and the vines of the red berries have to find another place, and that is the reason why there are never enough of the red berries.

“Next Manitou made the cranberries that grow on the little low vines and he put plenty of meat in them and made the seeds small and he remembered to give them a place that is all their own. He gave them the wet marshes where they can grow in the moss and among the thin wire-grass, and where the trees and

bushes cannot drive them away. There are plenty of them, but they cannot grow sweet on the cool damp moss, and they are very good only when the big cook at York Factory mixes them with the white man's sugar or when they are mixed with the tree sugar of the Chipewa country. Without sugar they are too sour.

“At last Manitou made the blueberries. He took a new color for them because all other berries are red or black. He gave them plenty of meat and made the seeds small and he did not forget to give them a place that is all their own. I think he gave them not only one place but three places. He gave them the little hollows on the rocks, where there is too little earth for trees to grow, and he gave them the sunny hillsides, where the pines are but few, and he also gave them many dry and open swamps, where they grow among the swamp-tea bushes. One summer I think they grow best in one place, and the next summer I think they are best in another place. But the Indians can always find plenty of them,

and they are very good because the sun shines on them and makes them sweet.

“They last a long time, too. Some are ripe when the wild birds are still singing, plenty of them are ripe during the moon when the wild ducks and geese cannot fly, and they are still plentiful in the dry marshes during the moon in which we gather the wild rice.

“The birds like them, the animals like them, and Magwah, the black bear eats them till his big stomach is full.

“They are the best fruit Manitou planted in the forest.”

Steve did bring home several other kinds of wild berries, but none were half as good as the big ripe blueberries. Shadberries, chokecherries, high-bush cranberries and sand-cherries added some variety to their diet, but all of these were rather sour without sugar, a luxury the two campers did not have. It was expensive and not in common use in those days. Wild plums were scarce around the lake, and for black-walnut and butternut

trees Steve looked in vain. They do not grow so far north.

As soon as the cave was finished Steve urged his father to build a canoe. "Then we can fish and hunt," he argued, "on all the lakes. Without a canoe we can't get anywhere. So let's build one. We can do it."

McLean was in doubt as to whether they could really build a safe canoe. Both he and Steve had seen Wahita and other Indians build and repair canoes, but he was aware that seeing a thing done is very different from doing it yourself. However, he consented to try it. They tramped about a whole day in search of suitable birch trees, for birches large and smooth enough to yield bark for a canoe are not common everywhere. When they finally found the trees, they discovered that they were too late, the bark would no longer peel. It was easy enough to peel off small pieces, by the taking of which thoughtless men and boys mutilate and make unsightly so many birch-trees near towns and

cities, but the large rolls needed for a canoe would not come off.

Steve was much disappointed by their failure. "Now we shall have to keep on fishing from shore till the lakes freeze over," he complained. "I wanted to get out on the water."

"You shall get out on the water, anyway, my lad," replied his father. "We will build rafts and put sails on them. If we go to it right smart, we can build a raft in a day and have time to spare."

They went at it the next day. While David worked hard cutting dry cedars, Steve pulled up and split long roots of black and white spruce and cut long strips of bark from young basswoods, for they had no spikes nor ropes for the building of their rafts. Articles of iron were scarce and expensive at Red River in those days and for many years later. Even thirty and forty years later, when long trains of two-wheeled ox-carts came every summer from Red River to St. Paul, the carts were built entirely of wood, including wheels and axles.

In three days of hard work father and son built three rafts, one on the home lake, and one each on a lake east and west of Lake Jessica.

Now they could fish and sail about to their hearts' content. When the wind was contrary they used the paddles which they had cut from light dry cedar, which is by far the lightest wood in the northern forests. In shallow water they often used poplar push-poles, which they picked up from poles which the beavers had peeled and sent adrift, for on each one of the lakes they found several large beaver houses.

A small canvas sail tied to a stout pole gave the rafts just the right speed for fishing, and frequently they caught fifteen or twenty good-sized pike and pickerel in a day, sometimes trolling and sometimes still-fishing from the raft.

Both sailors rejoiced when they discovered in the western lake a large marsh of wild rice bearing an abundant crop. Wild rice is the great grain crop in the country of the north-

ern lakes, but, like all wild crops, it is not always abundant. The lakes may be too low or too high for a good crop, or the weather may be unfavorable. The plants grow best on a mud bottom where the water is from six inches to two feet deep. As soon as the grain begins to ripen, thousands of blackbirds gather in the marshes, and after the grain has been shed, the wild ducks gather it from the bottom. But no matter how much is eaten by blackbirds and ducks or gathered by Indians and white men, enough rice remains in the dark mud as seed for next year; for wild rice does not grow from perennial rootstocks like bulrushes, cattails, pipestem reeds and the sharp-edged sedges, but it grows from the seed every spring just as wheat does or oats or corn. In July the long leaves may still float gently on the waves, but in September, when the grain is ripe, the big stalks are often more than ten feet tall.

Sailing, paddling, and poling their rafts was great fun for both father and son. It was hard work, too, and there never was a

day without wet feet. Sometimes the waves dashed over the raft, and at other times the sailors had to get wet in launching or landing their craft. But work and hardship only lent zest to their lives. Steve felt himself growing stronger, and both felt the joy of an active outdoor life such as no modern physical-culture doctor can produce by his scientifically planned exercise. Their appetites needed no peptones nor predigested foods. Fish and game disappeared in large quantities as soon as cooked, and they did not smoke and dry nearly as many fish as they had planned to do.

When they reached their camp in the evening they put on dry shoes or moccasins and neither of them ever suffered from any kind of ache in spite of exposures and hardships. Their food consisted almost entirely of game and fish which they generally boiled in Indian fashion, so that they could drink the hot broth.

As soon as the wild rice was ripe in September they gathered enough of it so that they could eat some every day, and after that they needed much less fish and meat.

The days went fast, because there was something to do every day; for a man, who must hunt and fish and gather wild fruit and grain enough to live on, generally has all the work he can do. The only days of rest were the Sundays, when they stayed in camp and took life easy and read and talked. Steve's one regret was that he always fell asleep so quick in the evening that it was no use for his father even to start a story.

CHAPTER XV

A WINTER IN TEPEE AND DUGOUT

BY the middle of September the wild ducks began to be thick on the lakes. All the young ducks could fly now, and the big wing-feathers of the old birds had again grown to full size. On windy and rainy days hundreds of birds were constantly on the wing, passing from one lake and feeding-place to another, while on quiet, sunny days large flocks could be watched, feeding in the open water or along the rushes.

Steve soon learned to recognize the mallards and redheads by their rather slow flight and large size, the pintails he could tell by their long necks and short pointed tails. The blue-winged teal, he learned, showed a white bar under the wing and flew exceedingly fast with softly whistling wings. They were the most numerous of all wild ducks, and some-

times passed over the tepee in flocks of two or three hundred.

The beautiful wood-ducks which are now getting rare, were also quite common. Then there were some of the pretty green-winged teal, the smallest and swiftest of all our ducks, as well as buffleheads and spoonbills, which generally flew in pairs or small flocks. By seeing them often and by sharp watching and looking, Steve learned to recognize them all, both on the water and on the wing, which is much more difficult than knowing them in a bird-book or in a museum.

In October several flocks of geese appeared on the lake as well as many large flocks of northern ducks, the scaups, or bluebills, as hunters call them. Add to these ducks and geese thousands of coots, or mud-hens, and one can imagine that the lakes were literally dotted with game birds of many kinds, not to count the thousands upon thousands of blackbirds which came from all directions to roost in the rushes at night. The two campers estimated that fifty thousand blackbirds

came to the western lake every evening. From four o'clock till shortly after sunset they came in flocks that were sometimes a mile long.

At first Steve found it hard to tell coots and ducks apart on the water, but he soon learned that all ducks looked more or less grayish or brownish, while the coots sitting on the water looked black and bobbed their heads as they swam about.

"It is now time," remarked David one evening, as they were returning to camp wet, tired and hungry, from one of their trips on the western lake, "that we do some duck and geese hunting in earnest and lay in a supply for winter. We may not find any big game and we don't know what luck we shall have fishing through the ice."

Thus far they had only secured a few ducks from time to time as they needed them for food, but early the next morning they began to hunt in real earnest, and at sunset they returned to camp, both loaded with all the ducks and geese they could carry. For about

two weeks they hunted in this way. After a good day's hunting they remained in camp one day to clean and smoke the game.

At the close of their hunt their cave looked like a provident farmer's smoke-house after the hog-killing season, when it is filled clear up to the door with sausages, hams, and bacon.

While many of the days were still warm, their cave was cool and airy, and it was filled with smoked ducks and geese hanging from poles under the low ceiling. They had smoked for winter use about two hundred large ducks, mallards, redheads, and canvas-backs, and fifty geese.

The supply looked as if it ought to last them a year, but both knew well that a man coming to camp after a hard tramp on a cold winter day will eat a duck for a meal, especially if he has little else to go with it.

Rabbits were fairly common in the woods and they saw also many grouse, but they felt that they could not use their ammunition on such small and scattered game.

Big game seemed rather scarce. They had seen tracks of both bear and moose, but the animals themselves they had not seen, and in those days deer were seldom found so far north.

About the beginning of November the lakes began to freeze over, and as they froze over clear, without snow, father and son had a few weeks of rare sport.

Before the ice was safe, and the middle of the lake covered, Steve "shied" many a flat stone over the smooth black surface, and his dignified father, before he realized what he was doing, was vying with his young son in skipping the flat, smooth pebbles and was as happy as a boy when Steve shouted:

"Hear them sing, Father! See them plump in!" and one who has ever listened to the strange music made by a stone sailing over thin, smooth ice will appreciate Steve's joy at this rare and peculiar melody of winter.

When the ice had thickened so that the stones no longer sang with the high, trembling pitch and no longer glided off a thin

film into the rippling water, father and son explored its safety with long sticks, and then Steve invented another game. He and his father now enjoyed many a curling match on the glossy ice. Sometimes they tried to see who could send his rock the farther, sometimes the aim was to send the rock the closer to a line marked on the ice. So much they enjoyed this improvised open-air game that they played it for hours at a time, forgetting the time of day, like schoolboys who miss the bell over their favorite sports.

And it was well that they did not count the hours and the days, for they had a long winter and many a stormy day ahead of them in their voluntary exile.

“Father, if we only had skates, if we only had skates!” Steve wished many a time. “We would skate all day and see every corner of every lake around here.”

However, skates they had not, nor had they any means of making them. But when his father suggested that perhaps they could make an ice-boat, Steve danced with joy and

turned several somersaults although the ground was no longer soft. Out of a few poles and a piece of canvas they quickly built a crude ice-boat. It would not make sixty miles an hour, and it did not steer very well, but it sailed and took them all over the lake.

They even took it apart, carried the parts to both the eastern and the western lakes, and sailed all over those.

In their walks over shallow water, both enjoyed the sight of the reddish-brown leaves of water-lilies and other plants that could be seen as clearly through the ice as if they had been growing in a glass tank. By lying down on the ice, Steve even discovered a few clams that had not yet crawled into deep water and a stray perch or pickerel glided away at the approach of the boy above him. Boulders and pebbles and ripples in the sand were as plainly visible as if all had been placed in a vast aquarium.

As the boy explorer drew away from shore, all these objects gradually disappeared with the increasing depth of the lake until the bot-

tom itself vanished so that it seemed to the lad that a sheet of glassy, black ice lay over a black, treacherous deep. These black, smooth lanes he was afraid to explore alone, although they seemed quite safe, for he could tell by the cracks that the ice was from four to six inches thick. But his father had told him: "Don't take any chances on thin ice. It's a fool's game. Breaking through the ice in deep water is a dangerous accident. If the ice looks at all dangerous, try it with a long stick. A man who gets under the ice is lost."

Both father and son had noticed that their supply of game had rapidly diminished during the weeks they played and sailed on the lakes and both felt it was time to do something towards supplying their daily food.

They decided to build a fish-house a rod or two out from the rushes, where the water was about twenty feet deep. It was not really a house, it was a pole-and-brush tepee, because they had no boards and they could spare no blankets except a small piece for the door. When the fish-house was finished no light

came through the walls of it, but a soft light from the water shone through its ice floor, and after they had cut a large hole into the ice, they could see a wooden minnow to a depth of six feet. By playing this wooden minnow on a line, they speared many a big pickerel which came to grab the bait.

During cold nights the water in the fish-house froze over, but as they opened the hole every morning the ice never grew very thick.

About the middle of November, the weather became severe. Toward evening it began to snow and in the morning the black buffalo robe which was the bedspread of the two campers was covered with a blanket of pure, fluffy snow.

"Oh, Father, this is great camping!" Steve exclaimed when he awoke and saw the snow. "We're real Indians now. Father, if old Indian Jim can live all winter in a tepee, we can. Do you think, Father, old Jim is still catching owls?"

"Perhaps he is, laddie," McLean answered, with a laugh, "but I can tell you for

certain what we have to do to-day and to-morrow and next day. We have to cut wood. Winter is upon us, and the wood we have cut will not last us over a week. If we don't get busy, we shall have to do as the Indian women do, and cut wood in a snow-storm."

For the next three days the sound of the ax rang merrily through the woods, and the hole in the fish-house was allowed to freeze over. On the south side of the tepee a clearing was started in the white birches. The straight white trunks, less than a foot thick, were cut and split into proper lengths to feed the camp-fire in the tepee or the cave.

The best wood for a camp-fire in the northern forest is green white birch. It burns neither too slow nor too fast, it makes very little smoke, it does not shoot sparks among the blankets, but it leaves a good bed of hot coals and it is easy to cut.

For their cooking-fires, the two campers cut up a good lot of small dry wood of any kind most easily obtained, willow and ironwood, oak, pine, and poplar.

Any kind of large dry wood, of course, also burns well, but for a camp-fire it burns too fast and it is too difficult to cut. A man cutting dry oak or ironwood would be tired out before he had cut enough to last him over night, while green oak and ironwood burn only if mixed with dry wood or placed on a big fire.

All the cone-bearing trees, pine, spruce, tamarack, fir, and cedar cut very easily, but they burn too fast and with a black smoke, and do not leave a good bed of coals, and one of them, the tamarack, shoots the red sparks in all directions.

Dead birch is worthless at all times. It never dries in its jacket of waterproof bark, but decays within a few years into a useless pulp.

For a camp-fire in the north, green white birch is the ideal wood, while for cooking the camper's meals, any kind of dry sticks or small wood serves well.

However, a man who would be happy in camp must take things as they come. All

weather, all food, all wood must be good to him. If white birch is not handy, yellow birch is good, and if no birch is handy, pine, spruce and tamarack are good, and sometimes drift-wood cast upon river bank and lake shore, when it is handy and plentiful near camp, is the best.

The two campers at Lake Jessica needed all the wood they had cut, and a good deal more, before ducks, geese, and blackbirds again passed over their camp.

In December, winter began in earnest, and Steve was quite willing to move from the tepee into the cave. The tepee was now converted into a storehouse, where smoked fowl, fish, and game froze as brittle as the ice on the lake.

During the next three months father and son spent many a day in the cave, while the storms raged over the forest with a dull continuous roar. They talked to their hearts' content and David read again a large part of his old Scotch Bible and Steve read again and

again the story of the shipwrecked youth in the Pacific until he knew the tale almost by heart.

They had set a few traps for mink, lynx, and marten, and visiting these traps, hunting and fishing for food, and making short snowshoe trips for the fun of it gave them enough to do.

Nor were they without company from the wild creatures. Late in fall, a little striped chipmunk had built himself a nest and gone to sleep in a corner of their dugout, and they were careful not to disturb him. A small flock of Canada jays came to their camp every day and learned very quickly to behave with saucy impudence. The only food to which they did not help themselves was the meat in the kettle or frying-pan over the fire.

Almost every evening at dusk two or three pretty brown deer-mice with large ears and big beady black eyes came foraging for scraps from the campers' meal.

Several big white rabbits were seen near the camp every day. "We must not hunt those,"

McLean told Steve. "They are our friendly neighbors."

The snowshoe rabbits had first been attracted by the brush of birches, jack-pines and poplars which the campers had felled. These northern hares eat practically every bush and tree of the forest, and when their food supply was running short, Steve cut down a few poplars or jack-pines for them, and the next day they could generally be found crouching in the brush of the felled trees.

On several occasions a porcupine came nosing around the camp. Porcupines are not very welcome camp visitors. They have a habit of eating up any box or bag that has been in contact with salt in any form, and they will even gnaw holes into doors and floors for the same reason. For protection they depend more on their coat of spines than on their wits. They are not fast runners, but when Steve poked one gently with a stick it took the hint and scampered back into the woods.

Several large owls were heard hooting al-

most every night, and many a time Steve found the remains of rabbits that had carelessly wandered too far from the protecting brush and had fallen victims to the fierce silent-winged robber of the forest.

The big timber-wolves were also quite common. Almost every night their weird howling mingled with the hooting of the owls. Steve and his father saw them quite often, for in those days they were not as wild and wary as in our days of high wolf-bounties, of cheap traps and poison, and of high-power rifles. While they never threatened to attack the two lone campers, they often followed their trails, and neither father nor son ever went far from camp without carrying a gun.

It was from a snowshoe trip to the eastern lake which Steve made alone in early March that he came near not returning.

Big game had been scarce all winter, but as Steve walked along leisurely through a spruce swamp, examining a few mink-traps set near a small stream, he struck a fresh moose trail.

His hunting instinct was afire at once and his imagination was fairly ablaze.

“What if I should get a moose all by myself? Wouldn’t father and Wahita be surprised? I’d keep the big horns as long as I lived and we wouldn’t have to hunt rabbits and dangle a wooden minnow through the ice any more. Moose meat would be some real meat. It’s like beef, Wahita says,” and without further thought he took up the trail.

An hour he followed like a hound on a fresh scent. Once he thought he heard the rubbing of the big, broad antlers against some brush. He followed another hour without seeing the moose, until suddenly the big bull arose a hundred yards to his right and crashed into a tamarack swamp.

The wily old bull, who had been hunted before, had curved back parallel to his trail and had lain down to watch for his pursuer.

Steve cut across on a run and rushed into the thicket. The trees grew too close for a man on snowshoes. So he hung them on a tree and pursued in his moccasins.

The moose, whose long legs serve the purpose of excellent stilts, both in a marsh and in deep snow, had passed quickly through the deep, loose covering, but Steve soon tired and had to sit down for a rest.

He looked around a minute. Where was he? He knew that he had never been in this part of the country before. But in what direction had the big black bull led him? How far and how long had he followed the trail? He didn't know. He had only thought of the moose and how glad and surprised his father would be when his young son rushed into camp and shouted:

“Father, I've killed a big moose!”

He reached into his pocket for his compass, to find in what direction the trail was leading.

A hot flush passed all through him. He had left his compass in camp and he had also neglected to bring his flint, steel, and tinder. He had broken two important campers' rules.

“Always take your compass and your flint and steel when you leave camp.” Both Wahita and his father had impressed these

rules on him, and he felt thoroughly ashamed of his carelessness.

His conscience was a little easier when he assured himself that he had brought a good lunch of rabbit meat. Of course he would have to eat it frozen now, but that didn't matter. He had good teeth, and frozen meat wasn't so bad; he had eaten some before.

He stood up to look around. And again he wondered how long and how far he had followed the giant wild beast. The sky was a dark gray all around and there was no clew to the position of the sun, the great compass of the world. A light snow was falling and the wind could be heard in the treetops. Was it getting dark? He had not noticed the snowfall, the wind and the fading of the light while he was following the trail.

And now it struck him that he would not get the moose. He could not follow the trail any longer. It was high time to turn back, or night would overtake him far from camp. It was hard to give up the moose when he had been so close to it, but he had, by this time, be-

come enough of a woodsman to submit to the inevitable.

Had he been an experienced big-game hunter, he would have known that stalking a moose which has been thoroughly frightened is a hopeless undertaking.

Bitterly disappointed, he turned back. As he had no idea in what direction he was from camp, he was compelled to follow his trail back. He found his snowshoes, put them on, and could now travel at a good speed.

Again and again he thought the lake ought to appear in view from the next hill, but there was always the same scene of pines, spruces, poplars, and tamaracks beyond the monotonous falls and rises of the ground. He had no recollection of ever having seen this desolate, wild country. And he had, in fact, not seen the country; he had only seen the trail of the moose.

To his horror, it was really getting dark and the snowfall and the wind were increasing. Several times he asked himself if he was on the right trail. He assured himself that he

was, although wind and snow and the gathering darkness were fast obliterating the trail, which seemed interminably long.

He increased his speed, but then he remembered that Wahita had said, "When you lose tepee, don't run. Sit down, think. If night comes, don't get scared like deer; stop build fire, make a camp. Find tepee next day."

What if he should have to stay out over night? He could not build a fire. He had not even an ax to build a warm brush shelter. And worst of all, what would his father think?

He had broken another camp rule. He had not told his father where he was going. His father might figure that he had gone to look at his mink-traps, but they were three miles from camp.

It was surely getting dark fast and the snowfall and the wind were increasing every minute. It was getting colder, too. If he did not reach the lake very soon he would have to camp on the trail in some thick woods till morning.

He heard some wolves howl in the distance up the wind and once more a hot flush rushed up his back and he determined to push on till he found the lake.

“If I only reach the lake,” he said to himself, “I know the way home.”

He almost fell down a steep narrow ridge and struck an open space. What was this? Was the world bewitched by some Indian devil? He didn't remember any open space along the whole trail.

He stopped and looked around.

Thank God! He was on the lake. But the next moment all hope again vanished. It was dark now, so dark that he could not see fifty feet around him and in the open on the frozen lake the wind had risen to a blizzard that drove the stinging ice crystals into his face. He had to rub his eyes, for it felt as if his eyelids were being glued together.

How could he travel three miles in the darkness in the face of this storm without missing his direction? And there was that open lane of water that extended half-way across the

lake! A man who fell into that open lane on such a night as this was hopelessly lost.

Again one of the warnings of his old Cree friend fairly rang in his ears.

“When you get caught in big storm, you stop. You make camp till big wind dies!”

But where could he make a camp? He had no flint and steel and no ax. Was he to freeze to death, or were the wolves going to get him, because just once he had forgotten a few simple camp rules?

Perhaps he could find a camp if he could not make one.

He groped his way up the bank a few hundred yards. It seemed a long time to his excited mind, but at last he found the object of his search, a big deserted beaver-house. He had opened it in the fall to see the inside of a beavers' den. There was a big room in it just as the old Cree had told them on Lake Winnipeg.

He slipped off his snowshoes, scraped the snow out of the opening and out of the inside. Then he broke an armful of spruce

brush, stuck his snowshoes on top of the house, slipped inside and closed the opening with the brush.

He had found a camp.

CHAPTER XVI

IN THE HOUSE OF THE BEAVER PEOPLE

THE camp in the beaver-house did not offer a soft bed, for the beavers just level off the pole floor with a little mud and dead vegetation. Much bedding would be useless, it would only become like so much soaked hay or straw and would soon be turned into muck, because every time a beaver steps out of his door he takes a plunge bath, and when he returns, he probably shakes the big drops from his fur in the entrance. But we cannot be quite sure of this, for no man has ever seen just how a beaver behaves when he enters his house, because the entrances are always under water.

However, Steve had escaped from the terrible storm and the piercing cold. Had he not found some safe shelter he would have been compelled to walk about the greater part

of the night to keep from freezing to death.

As soon as he had arranged his pillow of brush, he stretched himself to find the most comfortable position. For a full-grown man the beaver den would have been a little too short, and a fat man might not have been able to squeeze into it at all, but a lad of Steve's age and size could stretch himself at full length and could even rest on his elbow, but he could not sit up straight since the cavity was scarcely two feet high in the center.

It was a shelter such as perhaps no boy in distress had ever discovered before, but Steve did not think of that. As he lay in the dark hole and listened to the deep souging of the storm through the tree-tops, he felt that he had had a narrow escape from the horror of being lost and benumbed and of freezing to death in the arctic storm. It was strange how plainly he could hear the howling, souging, and roaring of the wind in his strange, dark lair. He even fancied that he could hear the soft swishing of the fine

snow, as it was being rolled over the house and was covering up the brush with which he had closed the opening.

“Won’t the wolves smell me and dig me out?” he asked himself, and a chill of fear and terror crept over him. However, the next moment he remembered that wolves never go near anything that looks at all suspicious, and he had stuck his snowshoes on top of the house so that the wolves would not come near him.

And then he thought of his father, and the warm blood rushed to his head. He knew his father was now anxiously calling and searching for him and was alarmed for his safety. What a fool he had been to forget all the big rules of camping! If he had only left a note telling his father where he had gone!

He almost yielded to the impulse of rushing out of the den calling for his father and firing his gun. But it would have been absolutely useless. His father could not possibly be near the beaver house yet, and even the

sound of a gun could be heard in this storm only a short distance down the wind.

He forgot that he was hungry and that he had pushed his lunch into a corner near his head, and, deeply ashamed and mortified at the worry he was causing his father, he sobbed himself to sleep.

It is one of the great blessings of healthy childhood, that in its profound sleep the good angels drive away its troubles, big and little, real and fancied, and in the morning the tears of yesterday are forgotten in the sunshine and joys of to-day.

On the hard floor in the strange dark room of the beaver people, Steve slept more soundly than thousands of pampered, spoiled, and fussed-over children in steam-heated apartments and under the care of ever-worried nurses and governesses.

The first thing he knew again, was that something touched and shook him. He awoke with a start and a yell and grabbed his gun, for the thought flashed through his con-

fused mind that the wolves had dug him out, and then he recognized his father's voice calling: "Come oot, laddie, come oot! Thank the Good Lord thee're alive!"

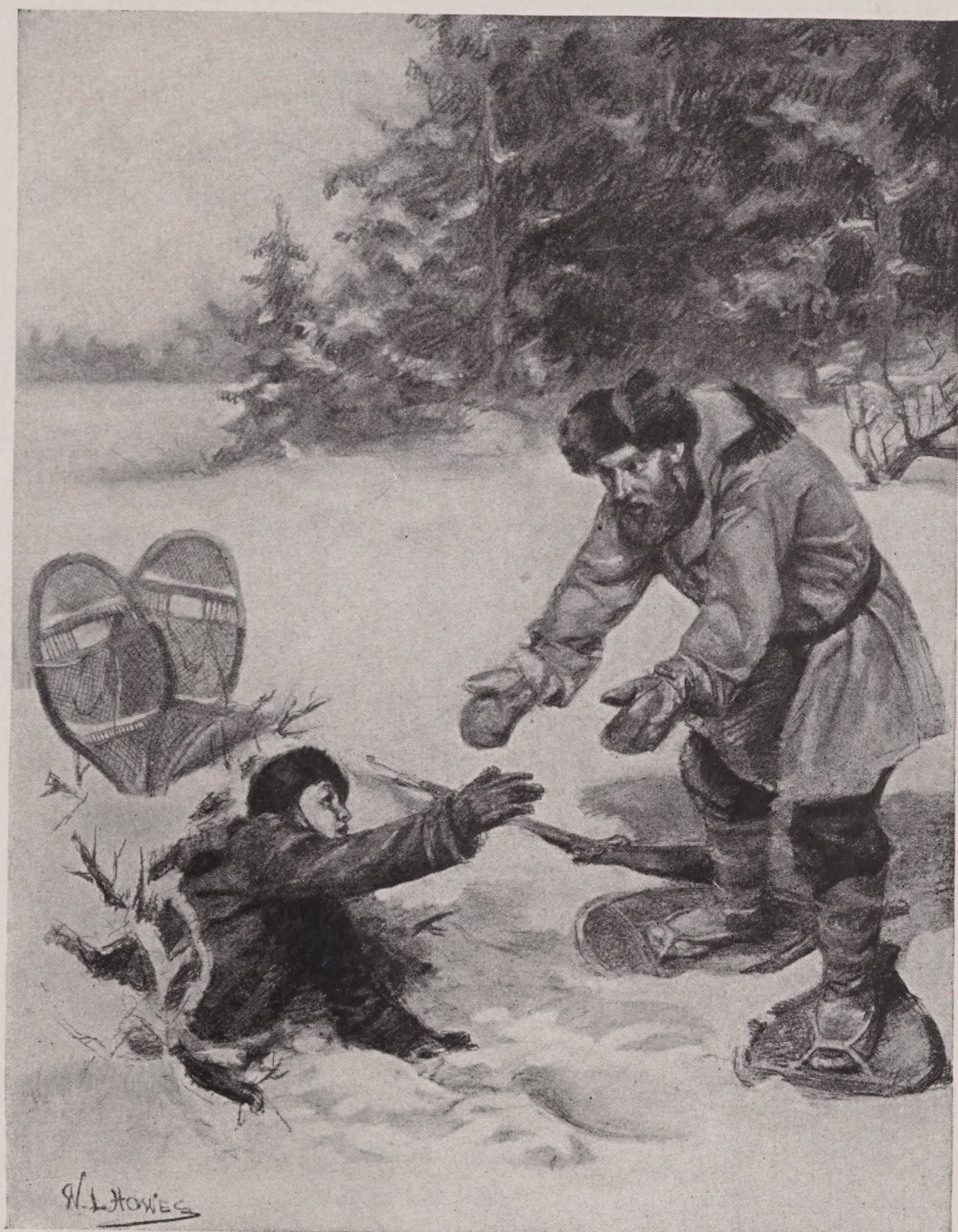
Like an animated spring, Steve shot out of his hole.

"Oh, Father, you've come," he cried. "I—I crawled in here. The storm caught me. I—I followed the moose, I forgot all"—and then his voice broke.

And the big man put his arm around the little fellow's neck and, pressing the lad's head close to his side, said with an unsteady voice:

"Don't thee blubber, lad; don't thee blubber. Come, we'll build a fire under the lee of the bank and we'll have some hot tea and goose-breast for breakfast."

The storm had let up, and father and son soon had a fire going, which melted a deep hole into the snow, and, together with the hot tea, warmed up the chilled, stiff joints of the lad who had spent the night in quarters, which, although they protected his hands and



"COME OOT, LADDIE, COME OOT!" — *Page 194.*

feet from freezing, were not comfortable nor really warm without blankets.

Steve related in detail the story he had at first told in a few broken sobs, and his father told how he had become thoroughly alarmed about the boy's safety, when with nightfall the storm had increased to great violence and Steve had not returned. Feeling sure that the boy was lost or that some accident had befallen him, the father had made his way carefully to the eastern lake where he knew Steve had set some mink-traps.

It was so dark in the forest that McLean had to follow the trail by feeling for it with his feet. After he had in this way reached the lake, he picked his way slowly along the northern shore, where trees and bank offered some protection from the north wind. All the time he kept calling for Steve, and several times he fired his gun, although it was very difficult to load and fire the old-style flint-lock gun in such a storm.

After they had related to each other the experiences of the day, they made their way

to camp without difficulty. That evening both father and son crept under the blankets when the northern woodpeckers, nuthatches, and chickadees sought their sleeping-holes.

Several more violent storms in late March followed the one in which both father and son nearly lost their lives; but Steve had, at last, learned his lesson. Never again was he caught away from camp without a compass, steel, flint, and tinder, and both campers were careful not to be caught in a storm far away from camp. They seldom separated, for both remembered with something like horror the agony each of them had suffered the time Steve followed the moose trail and had to seek refuge in the beaver house.

Early in April a sudden change seemed to come into the air. In sheltered places the snow began to melt a little bit; several of the winter birds began to call to each other, and both father and son thought they could in some vague manner smell spring.

Old Winter indeed seemed to have blown and snowed himself tired, but in the shaded

woods the snow showed no signs of melting, and the lakes lay as dead and frost-bound as if the ice, a yard thick, would never melt.

But then the wind turned south and blew from the south day and night. It did not seem to be really warm, but it had a magic effect upon ice and snow. Even in the timber, the thick white blanket became soggy and the white, glaring surfaces of the lakes changed to a dull watery gray, and, when Steve cut a hole into the soft ice, it quickly filled with water, like a well dug in gravel.

In a few days the ice had melted a few feet away from the shore. And then it went fast. The narrow band of open water rapidly widened into a black lane, and within a few days, a margin of dark open water, a hundred yards wide, ran all around the lakes, and the ice-floes in the middle of the lakes shifted back and forth with the changes in the wind, and the waves began to beat and wash against the thin edges, eating away a hundred or more feet in a day.

Then came a strong northwest wind which

piled white walls of ice along the southern shores, while in front of them on the water, lay the gray slushy ice. A few days later the wind shifted again to the south and Steve said, "Father, to-morrow we'll see the ice-wall on the northern shore."

They went to look for it, but it was not there. The south wind had broken up the soft ice-floes, the waves of the rapidly warming surface and the warm south wind had eaten up the ice during the night,—the lakes were open. Spring had come. No, it felt as if summer had begun. Heavy clothing became unendurable, the faces of the two campers were reddened by the bright, hot sun, and they moved back into the airy tepee.

It was now near the end of April. Ducks, geese, and blackbirds had returned; in the brush near open places sang innumerable juncos and woodland sparrows, and the willow-bushes, covered with fragrant catkins, dotted the vast brown swamps with patches of old-cream and soft yellow, and on the willow

catkins swarmed the almost noiseless little wild bees, that always emerge from their secret hiding-places as soon as spring has painted patches of cream and gold over the solitudes of dull brown northern swamps.

Within two weeks the aspect of the forest had changed from winter to summer, and Steve and his father might now, at almost any time, leave their winter camp and go to meet Wahita under the big elm on Red River.

Would he be there? What had happened at Fort Douglas? And what would they decide to do? Would they stay at Red River or would they go back to the States? If they went back to the United States, how should they go? By way of Lake Superior and Fort Williams, or by way of the Red and the Minnesota Rivers past the present site of Fort Snelling and St. Paul? Perhaps they might then go down the Mississippi as far as St. Louis, at that time the only city of much importance above New Orleans. It was at that period a frontier village of about ten

thousand inhabitants, and was a great fur-trading center and outfitting-post for the west.

The great expedition of Lewis and Clark, in search of an overland route to the Pacific, started from St. Louis in 1804. Through this expedition it became known that the head-waters of the Missouri and other rivers were immensely rich in beavers and other fur-bearing animals, and for fifty years numerous expeditions started for the Rocky Mountains in search of beaver. These fur-hunters were hardy and adventurous men like the gold-hunters of later years. A few found the fortune they sought and returned to civilization with a wealth of furs, but many, perhaps the majority, of the early adventurers, never came back. They were the advance guard of the white race invading the wilderness, and the losses in their ranks were heavy. Accidents, disease, and Indians cut them off in large numbers.

At Oxford House, Norway House, at Red River, and even at York Factory, McLean and

Steve had heard of the great beaver streams in the foothills of the Rocky Mountains and of St. Louis, the great fur town on the Mississippi. For among fur-traders and trappers in those days, the reports of good beaver countries spread like news of rich placer districts in the gold-fever days.

Steve and his father had talked over all these matters many a time as they sat before the fire in their cave on the long winter evenings and on many a stormy day.

Now they were both getting impatient to return to Red River and meet Wahita.

By the middle of May, when the country was dry enough for travel, they started east, each with a pack of blankets, their guns, a little ammunition, a few furs, and food for a few days.

Their tepee and the cave they left as they had used them. "Some Cree hunter will make good use of them," they said.

When after a few days they approached the big elm, they saw Wahita's tepee. In front of it sat the old Indian. He recognized his

friends a long way off and rose to meet them.

“Father,” remarked Steve, “he walks as if he had lots of news for us.”

CHAPTER XVII

WAHITA IN TROUBLE

STEVE was not mistaken. Wahita had much news and big news.

Lord Selkirk he told them had sent a hundred soldiers from Fort Williams. A white Chippewa, Shaw-shaw-Wabenasa, whose real name was John Tanner, had guided the soldiers in the midst of winter from Rainy Lake to Pubbe-kwa-wonga, the Lake of the Sandhills and then across the big muskeg carrying-place to Red River.

Tanner and some of the soldiers had made wooden steps, ladders of poles, and had climbed over the walls of Fort Douglas on a dark stormy night and had made prisoners of all the Northwesters in the fort.

Lord Selkirk himself was now at Fort Douglas, and had brought with him a big judge. His name was Coltman, and he was to punish all who had done wrong and was to

see that the Northwesters and the Hudson Bay men did no more fighting. The settlers had come back from Norway House and were building their houses and making gardens and fields.

Wahita paused and made some supper for his white friends, but after supper, when his pipe was lit, he had more big news to tell.

The white people had fought a big battle in their own country, where the big ships come from. The English had captured the big French war-chief. They had put him on a big ship and had taken him to a little island in the big sea. They had told him to stay there and never go on the war-path again. They had taken away all his ships and canoes and had placed soldiers on the island to watch him, for he was a big war-chief and would fight again if he ever got back to his own country.

Steve and his father learned later that this was Wahita's account of the battle of Waterloo and the exile of Napoleon to St. Helena, which had happened just two years before.

The settlement on Red River was, however, still in a precarious condition. The settlers had indeed returned, but they were all miserably poor and heavily in debt to Lord Selkirk and the Hudson Bay Company. They had no cattle nor horses, no plows nor wagons.

Moreover, they were almost starving, depending for food on the fish and small game they could catch, and on the stores of the Hudson Bay Company.

Indians, half-breeds, and whites were even now preparing to go on a great summer hunt after buffalo, and it was clear that next winter the settlers would again have to go to Pembina to hunt buffalo or to Norway House, where, in Playgreen Lake and other waters, fish were very abundant.

Wahita made his terse comment on the situation:

“Settlers in bad fix,” said he. “No oxen, no horses, no pigs, no sheep. No eat like white men, no eat like Indians, but starve like Indians. All very bad mess.”

He seemed to have something on his mind that troubled him very much. In the daytime he watched the preparations that were being made for the great buffalo hunt, while in the evening he sat and smoked in silence with a far-away look in his black eyes.

To Steve's question when he would go back to Hudson Bay he answered briefly, "Don't know. May be, not for a long time."

One evening, when he returned to the tepee quite late, he seemed to be especially troubled in mind.

At other times he would tell of the things he had heard and seen, but on this evening he ate in silence the supper of bacon, fish, and hot tea, which Steve placed on the mat for him. He was very fond of tea, but had been without it for some time; now, when McLean also offered him some tobacco which he had bought at the fort that day, he unburdened his troubled mind to his friends.

"Squaw will say," he began, "I'm big fool. 'You are old man,' she says, 'but you go hunt much. You go to Red River, you

no stay in tepee in Cree country and catch rabbit and caribou.'

" 'You are big fool,' she will say, 'you are old man, but you want to ride horse, you want to hunt buffalo. May be Blackfeet will find you and catch you again and cut your head off. You run away once. You no run away again.' "

After he had smoked awhile he explained the real meaning of his rather disjointed references to his squaw, to buffaloes, horses, and Blackfeet.

When he had seen the preparations for the buffalo hunt an uncontrollable desire had seized him once more to race after the big shaggy beasts and share in the excitement of a great hunt, as he had done many times when he was young and lived among the warlike and buffalo-hunting Blackfeet. His life in the Cree country had been uneventful, and the passion for action had seized him.

"I am old," he explained, "but I can run. I can ride and shoot, and I can fight if the Blackfeet find us.

“If I come back I bring squaw fine red blanket. Silk handkerchiefs, lots of beads for moccasins, big beads around neck, new ax, and lots of needles.

“She scolds. She says to me, ‘You are big fool to go in Blackfeet country.’ She takes things, she smiles, and I stay home in Cree country.

“May be Blackfeet kill me. Squaw cry much. May be say, ‘Wahita was good man, but was big fool to go and get killed.’ She go and live in tepee with son.”

Steve was at once wildly interested in Wahita's last buffalo hunt and before the camp-fire was allowed to go out, the three friends had agreed to join the great hunt together, for, in reality, McLean had become as much interested in the proposed big hunt as Steve and Wahita.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE GREAT BUFFALO HUNT

IT was decided that the three friends should join one of the hunting parties which were to start for the western plains by way of Pembina.

Pembina is now a small town on the Red River in the present state of North Dakota. It is located near the junction point of Minnesota, North Dakota and Manitoba, and from the beginning of the Selkirk settlement until about 1845, it was the great rendezvous of the buffalo hunters, for west and southwest of Pembina immense herds of these wild cattle blackened the plains.

In June 1840 an expedition left Pembina, consisting of more than fifteen hundred people, counting men, women and children; white, Indian, and half-breed. This great hunting party was provided with twelve hundred carts, one thousand horses, six hundred

oxen, and five hundred noisy and hungry dogs also joined in the great war against the wild cattle.

The expedition returned to Fort Douglas with more than one million pounds of pemmican and dried meat. For this amount of "plains provisions" about six thousand buffalo carcasses would be needed. It is, however, well known that not more than one-third of the animals killed were ever utilized, which would bring the total number of animals slaughtered by this one expedition up to eighteen thousand.

These figures show why the buffalo herds rapidly diminished after wasteful hunters with firearms could reach the buffalo country.

The party which Steve and his father and Wahita joined in the summer of 1817 was much smaller. It consisted of only about twenty-five hunters, Indians, whites, and half-breeds, the Indians being in the majority. Each hunter was riding as good a horse as he had been able to secure. Steve and

McLean had recovered the ponies they rode to Lake Jessica. Quite a number of extra horses were taken along, but no carts, for in those days the few settlers that had returned from Norway House had no oxen. Moreover, the members of this expedition expected to penetrate far west into the Blackfeet country where they might encounter hostile Indians. For this reason they did not take their families, but traveled very much like an Indian war-party. Two servants of the Hudson Bay Company went for the purpose of looking up the possibilities of establishing trading-posts in the Blackfeet country. Steve and his father, like most of the men, went for the love of adventure, and Wahita went, as he said, to see once more the great hunting-grounds of the Blackfeet before he returned to the big swamps of Hudson Bay and became an old man like Jim Seegush.

The party traveled westward by easy stages till they came within fifty miles of the junction of the Missouri and Yellowstone Rivers. They only hunted enough to provide

themselves with food, and most of them grew quite careless about watching for hostile Indians. They figured that they were now too far west for the Sioux and too far east for the Blackfeet. From a hill in this region the plains appeared black with buffalo.

McLean asked Wahita how many there were, but Wahita looked wild-eyed at the distant black masses and just replied:

“Many, many, many! More than little trees in the Cree forests. Many, many, many! Can’t count them.”

The next day the hunters made a great run for buffalo.

Each man dashed into the herd, picked out the fattest animals and killed as many as he could. Most of the hunters carried several balls in their mouths. After they had fired, a quantity of powder was poured into the barrel, a ball dropped on top of it, and again, the hunter rushing at full speed discharged his gun at close range at a selected young bull or cow.

When the hunt was over, it was found that



EACH MAN DASHED INTO THE HERD. — *Page 212.*

the hunters had followed the madly fleeing animals for more than two miles. Some of them had killed more than a half a dozen buffaloes. Steve and his father thought they had each killed one, but this being their first experience in a regular buffalo run, neither of them could find his game when the race was over. The horses they rode were not experienced buffalo runners and had become uncontrollable from the stampede of the buffaloes and the firing, shouting, and yelling of the Indians.

Wahita had killed five, and he rode back and picked out his game as easily as if he had put his own flag near each animal. All the other hunters seemed to be able to find and identify their own game without any difficulty.

Steve and his father were so much surprised at this that they asked Wahita how it was done.

Wahita thought a minute as if it were a hard thing to explain; then he answered:

“White men write. Each says he knows his writing. Other white men say they know

it. It is all scribble to Indian. White men learned to write, Indians didn't; Indians learned to hunt buffalo, my white brother and my white son didn't."

The great hunt had not been finished without accident.

One man had fallen with his horse and a wounded and maddened bull had gored him to death. Another man, a little unskilful in the management of his horse, had had his mount killed under him. The rider had fallen between the horns of the attacking bull and the frightened and angry buffalo had tossed the man back like a football. The scared man had landed on the back of another buffalo, but except for a few bruises, he had escaped unhurt. One of the white hunters had lost both his horse and his saddle. The horse was killed by a fall and before the rider could take off the saddle a mad cow that had lost her calf attacked the struggling horse. In some way her horns became entangled in the saddle and a moment later she was seen racing madly away with the saddle stuck on her

head. The man, although badly bruised and limping, had escaped without broken bones. He and others who had met with more or less ludicrous mishaps were the butt of many jokes and gibes when the hunters assembled in camp. Everybody was happy and there was much feasting, dancing, and singing in camp.

During the next few days the hunters remained in camp busily engaged in drying and smoking the meat, and although each man made about a hundred pounds of dried meat, as much as the extra horses could conveniently carry, a great deal of good meat was wasted.

The hunters had killed more animals than they could quickly care for in the warm summer weather, and of many of the older animals only the tongue was taken, the whole big carcass being left to be devoured by the hordes of hungry wolves and coyotes that were seen every day and could be heard howling every night.

The party having secured plenty of dried

meat, it was decided to push rapidly up the banks of the Yellowstone for a few hundred miles without stopping to hunt.

Wahita was not pleased with this decision.

"It is a big river," he said, "all the way to mountains. Will float plenty fur-boats. We don't need to go and see.

"We go much farther; may be Blackfeet will find us. We are too big to hide, not big enough to fight much. May be Blackfeet kill two, three to-day, kill two, three to-morrow. By and by kill us all. None of us get back to Red River. We are many days away now."

When Steve and McLean both told him that they desired very much to go with the party and see more of the new country he tried to persuade them not to go farther.

He had learned, he said, since they left Red River that the hearts of the Blackfeet were full of hatred toward the whites. Ten summers before, may be longer, two big white chiefs marched soldiers through their country. Up to that time the Blackfeet had never seen a white man. One of the soldiers killed

a Blackfoot and all the warriors of the tribe had sworn to kill every white man that came into their country.

This was the Indian version of an encounter that took place between a soldier of the Lewis and Clark expedition and a Blackfeet Indian, in which the Indian was killed.

McLean and Steve did not attach sufficient importance to the story, and persuaded Wahita to go with the party into the country of the hostile Blackfeet.

CHAPTER XIX

THE HUNTER'S PARADISE

WAHITA had often told of the Blackfeet country as the best of all game countries Manitou had made.

“All animals live there,” he had related, “and very many are good to eat and their skins are good, so the Blackfeet are seldom hungry and always have skins for their tepees and they have many, many horses.

“Eeneuah, the black-horned buffaloes are many. Auatuyi, wags-his-tail, the deer, hides in the timber near the rivers; ponoka, the elk, calls aloud where the mountains come down to the plain, and there are big gray bears and many black bears that are smaller. On the streams live many sis-stukki, cut-the-trees, the beavers, and in the forests of the mountains bellow the big moose.

“When you ride over the plains you see many antelope, that can run very fast and can make signals with the white hairs on their rump.

“The Blackfeet country is the best land for hunters!”

Steve and his father saw now that Wahita had told the truth, for never before had they seen so much game, or so great a variety.

On the Yellowstone they found beavers very numerous, and they passed several cottonwood trees, three feet in diameter, which the beavers had cut down.

The whole aspect of the country was different from anything that Steve and McLean had ever seen.

There were no dense forests and no swamps as in the Cree country, and there was no thick and tall green grass as in the Red River Valley. Fine groves of broad-topped cottonwoods lined the banks of the Yellowstone and its many tributaries. In the Cree country almost every stream flows between marshy banks. In this country there were

no large marshes, and the numerous tributaries could be forded almost anywhere.

On dry uplands grew the short pale-green bunch-grass and buffalo-grass, but it was not even pale-green now; it was almost brown. It was, in fact, hay cured on the stem, but the horses liked it and kept in good condition on it. On some very dry slopes the grass was very thin, but a shrub with small grayish-green leaves always covered such areas. Steve tried to pull up some of the stalks, but found that the roots grew deep into the ground where they could touch moist soil. When the horses walked breast-high through a reach of this sage-brush, large gray birds resembling prairie-chickens often rose with a noisy whirring flight.

Wahita, who took great pleasure in explaining to his white friends everything about this new country, called them sage-hens.

“They have plenty of good meat on their breasts and legs, but it tastes like sage, much like sage; but they are as good as the spruce-

hens of the Cree country that eat the strong-scented leaves of the tamarack and the spruce," he explained.

After camping a few times among some sage-brush, Steve learned that everything which comes in touch with sage-brush for a night will smell or taste of sage for a long time.

Along the headwaters of the small streams, and along dry runs and gullies grew a tall thorny bush with silvery-gray leaves and an abundance of pretty orange-red berries, but when Steve tasted them he made a wry face and spit them out.

Wahita laughed at him and remarked: "Buffalo berries not good now. Next moon, when they are very ripe, they are good. Now they pull your mouth like green choke-cherries."

Such was the country of the Blackfeet from the mouth of the Yellowstone westward. All the big game roamed there in abundance because the grass of the dry plains furnished

good pasturage and the timber along the streams offered sufficient shelter at all seasons.

The Blackfeet country was indeed the hunters' paradise in those days. But there was another thing that made traveling and hunting and camping in the region so delightful: there were no mosquitoes, that unspeakable pest of all those regions of the earth from the tropics to Greenland, wherever marshes, sluggish streams, and lakes abound. That miserable insect which makes a vast stretch of country from Labrador to Alaska practically uninhabitable during the summer months, the great summer plague of Red River and of the whole Cree and Chippewa countries, was absent. There were no mosquitoes, and man and beast could eat and rest in peace. Such was the country of the Blackfeet.

"Why did Manitou make mosquitoes?" Steve had once asked Wahita.

"I do not know why he made them, but he made them good creatures. Long ago the

mosquitoes and the flies drank only the honey of the flowers and the water out of the moss. Once Manitou had a quarrel with Matchi Manitou, the Bad Spirit, and Matchi Manitou taught the flies and mosquitoes to drink blood because he thought in that way he could kill all the people and animals Manitou had made. But Manitou shortened the lives of all mosquitoes, flies and bugs, and made the winters so cold that most of them freeze to death."

It was quite natural that all the members of the party should be desirous of staying for some time in a country where every kind of game was plentiful and where grass, good water, wood, and shelter were also abundant, with no mosquitoes to worry men and horses.

But Wahita began to feel uneasy for the safety of the party.

"We are now many days' travel from Red River," he counseled. "We are not a large force and have not many horses. If a large party of Blackfeet finds us, I am afraid they

will follow us for many days and kill many of us before we reach our own country. And if many Blackfeet come to hunt and camp between us and our own country, we may have to scatter or flee to the mountains and then many of us will never reach home.”

By this time the party had traveled about fifty miles up the Powder River and were encamped on its westernmost bend, in the present county of Custer in Montana.

It was agreed upon Wahita's warning that the hunters should rest here three or four days, while Wahita, Steve, and McLean rode another day's journey toward the Big Horn Mountains where Wahita had camped and hunted many years ago, while he lived with the Blackfeet.

“You watch all the time, day and night,” Wahita warned the hunters. “If not, Blackfeet may surprise you, steal your horses, and kill many of you, may be all of you.”

Wahita and his two friends then traveled up the Powder River until they came well within the foothill country where the beauti-

ful open groves of yellow pine invite the hunter and camper. But Wahita was restless and ill at ease.

"I fear that they will not watch," he expressed himself in the evening as he leaned in his blanket against the trunk of a big pine. "They have grown careless. They say Blackfeet are far away, near the big mountains. May be they are, may be they are not."

Both Steve and McLean would have liked very much to explore the country clear to the rim rock of the mountains, where the streams come down roaring canyons, but the old Cree seemed to live under a foreboding of danger, so they started back after the second night out.

Toward evening they came within sight of the camping place. As if by a common impulse, all three stopped their horses and gazed intently toward the camp-site. The tepees were gone. No smoke arose; neither man nor beast was to be seen.

They tied their horses and crept toward the

place, crawling on all fours for the last two hundred yards.

The tepees had been burned. They saw several horses, but they lay stretched out dead. Three dark objects they could also discern lying near one of the burned tepees. They had seen enough. The Blackfeet had attacked and evidently surprised the camp. Several horses and men had been killed. How many had escaped it was impossible to tell. The three scouts were afraid to investigate any farther for fear of some concealed enemy.

“Big fool hunters,” Wahita muttered; “they did not watch!”

CHAPTER XX

THE CAMP NEAR THE RIM ROCK.

THE three friends hurried to their horses and rode back up the river for a mile before they made camp. But this night they built no fire, and they tethered their horses for fear of losing them.

The next day they did some careful scouting, and found the country below full of Blackfeet. From well-concealed positions they could see several large camps and several large herds of ponies.

To follow now on the trail of the escaped hunters, if indeed any of them had gotten away, would have been madness. The three friends were cut off, and the only thing they could do was to keep from being discovered by the hostile Blackfeet, and watch their opportunity for getting away. When such an opportunity would come, it was impossible to say.

McLean and Wahita realized that they were six hundred miles from the nearest white settlement at Red River and that perhaps they would never get back. To St. Louis, where McLean had often thought he would like to go, the distance was over a thousand miles. It would be easy enough to build a boat or a raft and float down the Yellowstone and the Missouri, but it would be impossible to travel that distance without falling into the hands of hostile Indians.

For a white man who is impatient and rebels against fate it was a hard situation, and many times did McLean wish that he had never joined that foolish band of buffalo-hunters. In these moments, the stoic indifference and apparent contentment of the old Indian made McLean feel that he wanted to apply all the favorite strong terms of Wahita to the old man himself.

There he sat, smoking his old pipe filled with tobacco and kinnikinnick as calmly and happily as if he were sitting in front of the

tepee on the Assiniboin and had his grandchildren clambering about him.

“Confound the old fellow!” thought McLean. “Here we are cut off and condemned to be scalped by the Blackfeet any day and that old brown stump sits and smokes and dreams as if he were looking forward to the event with real inward pleasure!”

“What are we going to do, Wahita?” he finally broke out. “We can’t stay forever in this God-forsaken wilderness!”

The old Cree kept on smoking for awhile, and a faint smile passed over his dark features. Then he replied with the dignity which he assumed only on important occasions.

“Anything goes wrong, white man swears, kicks things around, makes a big fuss. No good; things wrong anyhow!

“This is a good country, plenty of game, plenty of water, plenty of wood, no mosquitoes. We keep away from Blackfeet. Some day, may be, we get back to Red River.”

As for Steve, he didn't care; as long as his father and Wahita were with him, he was satisfied, and he agreed with Wahita that this was a good country. There was always plenty to occupy his time. He learned to stalk elk and antelope and the black-tailed deer. He watched the antics of gophers and prairie dogs, and the chattering of the black-and-white magpies. He watched the golden eagles soar thousands of feet above the foothills, till their immense pinions looked no bigger than the wings of a sparrow. He saw both black bears and grizzlies but Wahita had told him to keep out of the way of the grizzlies.

In those days the grizzly was king of the plains and foothills and feared neither man nor beast, for the Indian hunter armed only with bow and arrow, was no match for the shaggy king of brutes.

McLean was in favor of trying to get through or past the camp of the Blackfeet, but Wahita would not consent to this plan.

"The Blackfeet," he argued, "are mad at

the whites. Some of their men were surely killed in the fight with the hunters, because the hunters all had guns and most of the Blackfeet have no guns because they are too far away from the traders. They are very angry now, and if they find our tracks they will work very hard to overtake us, and if they find us they will surely kill us. No, we must not travel through the Blackfeet country now; it is too dangerous."

"But where shall we go and what are we to do? We cannot stay here always."

"To-morrow we shall travel up the river and go near the place where the mountains begin. There we will make a camp and stay till the Blackfeet have left and have gone to the western part of their country."

This plan was carried out. For several days the three friends traveled up-stream till they reached the open forests of yellow pine in the foothills and could plainly see the dark forests of lodge-pole pines on the slopes of the Big Horn Mountains.

"Here we stay," said Wahita, "and I think

we stay till the geese fly north again. I know that the Blackfeet will camp this fall and winter near the mouth of the Yellowstone, so we cannot go back. In spring, if they find no more whites coming into their country, they will go back toward the western mountains."

McLean did not at all like the idea of living another winter in the wilderness, but there was nothing else to do but to submit to the inevitable.

As he thought the matter over, he saw clearly that even here their position was extremely dangerous; he therefore proposed to Wahita that they build a stockade like those enclosing the Hudson Bay posts.

"It is a good plan," said Wahita, and they set to work at once. Slender straight yellow pines were abundant, and Steve thought it was lots of fun cutting them down. The hardest work was digging the trenches to set the poles in, for they had no spades nor shovels. However, they made wooden shovels and sharpened poles and after a week of hard work their fort was completed. It was

large enough for a tepee, and in one corner they had built a shed for their horses where the animals could stand and lie under a roof of brush and grass. More protection they did not need, for they were accustomed to sleep in the open all winter.

Through the corner opposite the horse-shed ran a small stream.

“It is a good fort,” remarked Wahita. “We are very safe now, for Indians are all afraid of forts. They will not go very near and never try to climb over the posts. If they do not catch us away from the fort we are very safe.”

The next morning, Wahita climbed to the top of a tall pine and for an hour spied carefully over the country for miles around.

When he came down he told his friends that he had looked many miles down-stream and that he had seen no tepees and no smoke and that there were no Indians in the country.

“We should now hunt and make enough dried meat so we shall not starve in winter,” he advised, “when game may be scarce.”

For about two weeks all three of them stalked buffalo, elk, and antelope. But every morning, before they went out to kill game or smoke meat, Wahita climbed the tall pine.

"We must not be caught," he said, "like the fool hunters. If I can see Indians, we must not shoot nor build fires."

At the end of two weeks the hunters decided that they had plenty of meat and they had also made a small stack of hay to feed to their horses, in case, on account of Indians, or for other reasons, they should wish to keep their horses in the palisade.

For a week they took life easy. They mended their clothing, blankets, and saddles, put a few finishing touches on the stockade, cut some wood, looked over their guns and few traps, and attended to other little things to make their camp comfortable.

One evening Wahita told about a method used by the Blackfeet to catch eagles, and Steve was so much interested in this plan that he begged his Indian friend to help him catch an eagle.

Wahita was not much inclined to try the plan. He said it was dangerous and was also much hard work. However, Steve was so enthusiastic about it that, at last, Wahita consented and a few days later, with his white boy friend, rode out of the stockade equipped for hunting eagles.

CHAPTER XXI

CATCHING THE KING OF THE AIR

THE two eagle-hunters rode a few miles down-stream from camp till they came to an open plain, from which the view was unobstructed to the dark, distant ridges of the Big Horn Mountains, and from which a keen eye could also follow the northeastward trend of the Powder River Valley for many miles.

Steve had been much mystified by Wahita's preparations. On the preceding afternoon the Indian had cut a vicious-looking wooden hoe out of a gnarled scrub oak, and to the boys' inquiring look as to the use of this peculiar tool, had briefly remarked:

"We use him for catching eagle." The remark only piqued Steve's curiosity, for he could not conceive why a hoe should be needed to catch the king of birds. If they had gone to dig out a woodchuck, there would

have been sense in taking a hoe. He wanted very much to ask Wahita more about the use of the hoe, but he had learned that the old Cree, when he was in the mood, delighted in nothing so much as in piquing the curiosity of his boy friend. Only a few weeks ago the old man had, with much display of ceremony, counted out a hundred service-berries and strung them carefully on a long horse-hair as if they were valuable beads. Then he had wound them around a peeled stick and on two evenings he had dried them carefully near a little special fire. Steve had been watching every act of Wahita with keen curiosity, and when on the second evening the old man built his little special fire Steve rose to the bait and asked what he was going to do with the string of berries.

“Eat them, may be; dried berries are good to eat,” came the answer, while no wrinkle changed the face of Wahita. Steve knew then that the whole performance had been designed to incite his curiosity and he resolved not to be caught again.

In addition to guns, knives, and axes, Wahita took the vicious-looking hoe, a crude wooden spade, and a sharp pole. What part these tools were to play in catching an eagle Steve could not imagine.

Within a hundred yards of a clump of young yellow pine Wahita stopped and dropped his wooden tools.

“We catch him here!” he remarked.

Steve looked about and scanned the clump of yellow pine.

“Where is he?” he could not refrain from asking.

“Far away. In the mountains; may be in the clouds. He see us, may be he come, and we catch him. Now we dig a big hole.”

Steve had heard of bears being caught in a pit, but why a big hole was needed for catching an eagle he could not see. However, as Wahita started in all seriousness to dig a pit with hoe and spade, and sharp pole, Steve heartily joined in the work.

It was late in the afternoon when Wahita decided that the hole was big and deep

enough. They had indeed accomplished with their poor tools a hard piece of work, for the hole was a little more than seven feet deep and large enough to hold a man and a boy either standing or sitting. One side was dug slanting and was provided with a few footholes so that the hunters could get in and out.

Steve was hungry and tired enough to go home, but why a pit was needed for catching an eagle and what was to bring the eagle he had not been able to figure out.

On the following day the two hunters started early. "May be we catch big eagle to-day," observed the Indian as he and the white boy rode out of the stockade. Within half a mile of the pit, the Indian shot a yearling blacktail which he threw across his horse and took along to the pit, and Steve wondered what part the deer was to play in catching an eagle.

Arrived at the pit, Wahita scattered the excavated dirt among the sage-brush and then cut a number of stakes the size of strong tent stakes. He next partly skinned the deer,

spread the skin over the hole, and staked it down firmly thus leaving the carcass attached to the skin stretched over the hole. Parts of the hole not covered by the skin of the deer, Wahita carefully closed with sage-brush and when the tools and guns had been concealed and the horses tethered on the other side of the pine grove, the old Cree climbed into the pit and with a broad grin on his dark leathery face invited Steve to follow him.

“We stay here,” Wahita explained, “till eagle comes. He flies in big rings far away. By and by he sees plenty meat of deer. He comes nearer. He sees the black and white talking-birds, the magpies. They eat. They say it is good, it is no trap. The eagle believes it is safe, he comes down, I hear his big wings. By and by he sits down and begins to eat meat. I reach out, catch him by the legs, pull him in the hole. He is caught. He is mad, he fights, but I tie him up, wings, feet, bill. Or, maybe, I jump on his back and kill him, and make war-bonnet of his big feathers.”

At last Steve understood the whole process of catching an eagle and he also saw why Wahita had not taken the guns into the pit but had left them under a clump of sagebrush. One thing more the white boy soon realized, namely that Wahita's plan of catching an eagle was likely to be a very long drawn-out and tedious game, a regular game of Indian patience.

It seemed to Steve that they had been sitting for hours in perfect silence. The Indian spoke not a word and there was no sound of either bird or beast. In fact Wahita seemed to have gone to sleep.

Steve suggested that Wahita light his pipe, but the Indian refused, saying that the eagle would smell the smoke and would not come; and Steve could not make out whether this were really true. Perhaps it was one of the Indian superstitions of Wahita, or perhaps it was another one of those statements made with the intention of tantalizing him. He always had to be on guard against swallowing some absurd story. He wished now that he

had not gone into the pit. It would be a fearful trial of his patience if he had to sit in that hole all day. He was getting hungry, too, and he wanted very much to ask Wahita to let him get out and hide among the pines till the eagle was caught, but he felt that the old man was even now inwardly chuckling at the impatience of the white boy, so he resolved to stick it out.

At last, after an interminably long time, Steve thought it must be almost evening—two magpies alighted on the carcass. Very soon a few more arrived and all began a noisy, chattering talk. Some magpies flew away and others came until Steve thought they would eat up the deer before an eagle ever saw it. Then all the magpies flew away. Again there was a silence for a long time, and Steve again began to wish that he had stayed under the pines. This was certainly the biggest fool way of catching an eagle. Why didn't they lie down under the sage-brush and then shoot him when he came to the meat? That would have been the way Steve

and his father would have tried to get an eagle. Perhaps it was all a put-up game like that one with the service-berries and the horsehairs, only a bigger one.

But now the old riddle-faced Indian began to wake up. He actually stood up and listened and for the first time all day, his face showed that he was really alive. He laid his ears close to the wall. Steve did the same. Both heard a kind of dull, thump, thump, as if several Indians were approaching.

"Queer noise for an eagle to make," Steve was just saying to himself, when the old Cree grabbed him and almost shoved him out of the hole.

"Grizzly bear!" he whispered. "Run, run, climb up tree!"

Steve and Wahita fairly shot out of their eagle pit, just before the grizzly almost tumbled into it. For a moment the great gray king of the plains and foothills was surprised both at the pit and the two men that bolted out of it, then the king's surprise quickly

changed to anger and rage, for in those days the grizzlies feared neither man nor beast. He gave chase to those two bolting creatures. One of them, Wahita, picked up his gun and fired at the king, slightly wounding him and increasing his rage. After firing the Indian dropped his gun and ran, the bear after him. Steve was already safe among the branches of a young pine. Wahita had no time to select a good tree. He started to shin up the first one he reached. The grizzly was there only a few seconds behind. With his big right paw he reached up for his enemy, but Wahita, in spite of his sixty years, had developed almost as much nimbleness of legs and arms as Steve, and the big grizzly only brought down Wahita's right leggin and moccasin. These he at once, amid horrible growls and whoofs, tore into shreds, while Wahita shouted something to him which Steve could not understand, but which did not sound like blessings and good wishes.

After a while the grizzly seemed to forget

that he had two men safely treed, for he went and pulled the deer carcass off the pit and dragged it into a dry run, where Steve and Wahita could no longer see him.

“What did you say to him?” asked Steve, when the two eagle hunters had slid down from their safe perch.

“I talked Blackfeet to him,” replied Wahita, “for he is a Blackfeet bear and does not understand Cree or English. I told him he was a thief and a coward for trying to kill us in a pit and pull us out of a tree. I told him I would kill him for tearing up my leggin and moccasin.”

Thus ended the first eagle-hunt of Steve and his Cree guardian. They picked up their guns and started for camp. They did not try to follow the grizzly. “He is a mad one,” said Wahita, “and would attack us again. Let him go for to-day.”

Moreover, it was almost evening now and Steve was ravenously hungry. Wahita never took along anything to eat. He never

seemed to be hungry, but he could always eat a big meal whenever there was anything to eat.

“That is because he is an Indian,” McLean had explained to Steve. “He has lived that way since he was a boy; like the four-footed hunters, that eat whenever they can kill game.”

CHAPTER XXII

GETTING HOMESICK

IN the evening after Wahita had eaten his fill of meat and lit his pipe of kin-nikinnick mixed with a little tobacco, the old man became talkative.

He explained that they would have to catch the big grizzly before they could think of catching an eagle.

“The bear would come to our pit again,” he said, “and the next time we might not get away and he would kill us, or hurt us so much that we would be sick a long time.”

“Why don’t you take your gun into the pit and kill him if he came again?” McLean asked.

“You can seldom kill a grizzly with one shot,” the Indian replied, “unless you shoot him through the head; and you have no time to take careful aim. This big old bear is not afraid of man and he will attack us if he can,

so we must catch him before we try to catch an eagle."

The next day the three men built two deadfalls not far from the eagle-pit and they baited them with the parts of the deer the bear had left; Wahita dragged the meat to the deadfalls after his pony.

"The big bear," he told his friends, "will smell the trail and find the deadfalls."

Three days later they found the big beast in one of the traps. The heavy drop log had broken his back and the king had died without any struggle.

Wahita gave a shout when he found his quarry and exclaimed: "Now we go and catch the eagle!"

This time, however, the Indian killed three coyotes and fastened their skins and carcasses over the pit just as he had done with the deer.

"Coyote is better for catching eagles," he explained. "Bears do not like coyote meat but they like deer meat. If we killed a deer, another bear might come and make us run and climb trees."

Steve would have preferred to let Wahita catch the eagle alone, but he knew his Indian father would laugh at him and make fun of him if he did not see the game through.

So the two eagle-hunters slipped into the pit very early before daylight.

“The eagle, may be, sits far away on a tree or on a rock,” Wahita taught his white son. “We do not see him, but he sees us. He sees everything many, many miles around. If he sees us go into the pit he remembers it and will not come, even if the magpies come and say it is safe.”

All day long the two friends sat and stood in the pit. The magpies came and chattered and laughed and picked at the meat, but no eagle was heard or seen. In the evening McLean, who had a big kettle full of meat and berries ready for supper, laughed at the disappointed hunters. Steve was much disgusted and would have liked to give up the whole plan, but Wahita only smiled and remarked:

“May be we catch him to-morrow.”

On the next day their patience was again tried for hours. Then both heard a sharp scream far overhead and Wahita at once became alert and whispered: "He is coming."

Half an hour later there was a flapping and rushing of great wings and the eagle alighted on the carcasses. As the stretched skins yielded like a spring under the impact of the bird's weight, the big eagle became suspicious and flapped his wings as if he would rise again. But quick as an arrow Wahita's long arm shot out. The eagle was firmly grasped by one foot and was pulled down into the pit. Before the big bird knew what was happening to him, Wahita had hold of the other foot, while Steve grabbed him by the neck right behind the head so he could not strike his formidable hooked bill into his captors. For a few seconds, however, the captive eagle struck powerful blows with his big wings, but he was quickly turned on his back and made helpless. Wahita tied his terrible talons with thongs of rawhide and Steve's handkerchief was used to muffle his black hooked



THE EAGLE WAS FIRMLY GRASPED BY ONE FOOT. — Page 250.

beak. With a broad strip of rawhide the powerful wings were securely tied to his back and the king of the air was a helpless captive. Steve executed an impromptu war dance around the pit and the captured king was taken in triumph to the palisade, but both Wahita and Steve had several blue marks on their faces where the fighting eagle had struck them with the hard elbow-joint of his wings.

For a week they kept the captured king of the air in the palisade. After a few days he began to eat fresh meat they gave him, but he was savage and would allow no one to approach him. Wahita wanted to kill him, but Steve pleaded eloquently for the great bird's life and liberty.

"Let him go," he argued. "Perhaps he has young for which he must catch sage-hens and fawns."

"No," replied Wahita, "the young are big now. They can catch sage-hens themselves. I want to make a war-bonnet out of his feathers for my boy and myself."

At last the two white men persuaded their friend to let the eagle go after they had clipped two fine black quills out of each of his wings. This, Wahita had told them, would not hurt him and would not interfere with his flying. In later years Steve and his father told many times the story connected with the two big eagle quills on the wall of their cabin.

When the eagle had been let out of the palisade, he ran a few steps with flapping wings and rose heavily from the ground. It seemed hard work for him to reach the height of the pines, but when he had cleared the tree tops he spread his great wings like black sails to the breeze and began to soar skyward in grand sweeping spirals. At the height of five hundred feet he began sailing toward the mountains on motionless wings. The three men stood and watched him, glad that they had given him back the freedom of the air. The great wings grew smaller and smaller as he drifted westward, and in less than half an hour the giant bird vanished

as a black spot against the white clouds, and even the keen eyes of Wahita could see him no more.

Soon after the adventure with the eagle and the grizzly bear, the three friends made a scouting trip down stream to discover, if possible, the whereabouts of the Blackfeet. But their trip disclosed only the most disheartening state of things. The whole Blackfeet nation seemed to be camping and hunting in the region of the junction of the Yellowstone and Powder Rivers. In fact the three scouts had a narrow escape from being discovered by a party of Blackfeet hunters. Only by hiding their horses in a thicket and twisting the bridle ropes around their mouths did they keep them from neighing and betraying their presence to the dreaded Blackfeet. McLean was very much disturbed by this discovery and the narrow escape of the party.

“Sooner or later they are going to discover us and lift our scalps,” he asserted. “It is only a question of time about our cap-

ture and death. We ought to get away from this place. Why not strike out south along the foothills of the mountains till we reach the headwaters of the Platte or the Arkansas River? We would, at least, get away from the dangerous neighborhood of the Blackfeet.”

Wahita agreed that their camp was in a dangerous place. “But,” he argued, “all Indian country is dangerous and all Indian life is dangerous. Blackfeet are dangerous, Mandans and Crows, and Sioux, all are dangerous to strangers.

“Bears may kill you, panther is dangerous, mad buffalo and elk are dangerous, rivers are dangerous, bad storm may kill you. But Indian is careful, he watches, he fights and, may be, he does not get killed, but dies in his tepee when he is very old and when he has met many dangers. His children cry when they bury him, and they burn his tepee and leave food on his grave. It is all the same. When a man has lived long enough Manitou sends somebody to set his spirit free. It may

be an enemy, or a bear, or a storm. But it is all the same, we die when Manitou says we have lived long enough."

At first McLean felt provoked at this philosophy of life, but the old man spoke every word with so much solemn earnestness, that McLean was disarmed and could make no angry reply.

"I only mean to say," he answered, in a very friendly manner, "that I begin to feel like the man, whose story is told in an old book of the white people. His name was Ulysses. He joined a big war-party and was separated from his friends and was shipwrecked on the big sea and was cast up on a strange island and wandered through many strange lands. When he reached home after many years his son did not know him and his wife did not know him, only his old dog and an aged servant had not forgotten him."

Wahita looked puzzled. "Is the white man's country so big and is it wild? I thought it was small and it was all gardens as on Red River."

"It is very big, but it is not wild now. But a long time ago much of it was as wild as the countries of the Indians. This story is about something that happened three thousand years ago."

"That is very, very long ago. It must have happened before Manitou made the Indians and the beavers."

"Steve and I wish to get back to our own people and our own country," McLean continued. "We are very homesick. We wish to go to the big camp of St. Louis and make a field and a garden and build a cabin."

"The boy is not homesick," Wahita replied with a laugh.

"No," admitted McLean, "he is not. He is at home wherever you and I are."

"You are right about going home," the Indian continued. "But we cannot go now. Winter is coming and traveling is too dangerous. When spring comes again, we shall travel along the foothills and find a river that will take you to the big fort of St. Louis."

CHAPTER XXIII

STALKED BY A PANTHER

AFTER Steve's experience with the grizzly bear and the eagle, life in the palisade assumed for a while a routine aspect.

Wahita had made a bow and some steel-tipped arrows for the party, and with these primitive weapons they did most of their hunting in order to save their ammunition, which began to run low and which they could not replenish until they met some white trader. The steel arrow-heads Wahita had brought from Red River, for even in those days many Indian tribes had given up making stone arrow-heads, preferring to buy the steel points furnished by all Indian traders.

By this time McLean had made up his mind to reach St. Louis as soon as possible, because he felt that staying in this region any longer would only increase the danger to

which the three lone hunters were constantly exposed. Wahita's and Steve's experience with the grizzly had strengthened this feeling, and the fear grew on him that some day one or all of them would be surprised and cut off by the Blackfeet.

They had scarcely thirty rounds of ammunition for each gun, which was a small amount to depend on for perhaps six months, and all their equipment was wearing out. Their clothing, moccasins, blankets, and saddles all showed the effects of rough usage. Their hair had not been cut since they had left Red River and all three began to look more and more like real wild men of the forest.

Their food, too, was exclusively of the kind on which savage hunters are compelled to subsist. They had had no salt since the big buffalo run near the Yellowstone, and they had now lived for months on nothing but meat, seasoned and varied occasionally by such wild berries as they could gather.

Their compass had been smashed on one

of the wild buffalo runs on the plains, and their only guides in travel were the sun by day and the stars by night. Wahita, through the experience of a long life, had developed a kind of instinct for direction. Deer, elk, or bear might lead him any zigzag course over hills and rivers, through open forests and thickets, but when the hunt was ended, he stretched out his long arm and called out, "Our camp is there!" Steve and his father had to be much more careful, but they learned to guide themselves by the direction of the hills and the course of the rivers, and while they were often lost for an hour or two, they always found their way back to camp without great difficulty.

Wahita took all these hardships as a matter of course, but McLean had had enough of the hard life of the wilderness. If the old Indian had been willing, he would have started toward St. Louis as soon as they felt sure that their return to Red River was cut off.

But to such a plan Wahita would not listen.

“We must not travel over the plains and across the rivers in winter,” said he. “Bad storms may catch us, and when the snow lies on the ground the Indians can trail us too easily. No, we stay here till spring.”

So they put in the time as best they could. They hunted some every week, they put their equipment into the best possible shape, they improvised shooting-matches with bows and arrows until both Steve and his father became quite proficient in archery, and they slept as much as nature would permit.

Toward spring an incident occurred which made McLean desire more than ever to get away, because it showed him once more that he might any day lose his only child in one of those unavoidable accidents and dangers that lurk ever in the path of the lone hunter. The incident even impressed care-free and light-hearted Steve with the sense of constantly threatening danger.

About the middle of the afternoon Steve had sauntered away from camp and had struck the trail of a fine black-tail buck.

Again and again he came within sight of the animal, accompanied by several does and yearlings. Three times Steve stalked the buck in regular Indian fashion as he had learned from Wahita. But a twig snapped, a stone started rolling or he brushed against some bush so that the deer took alarm and kept out of reach. At last he was able to send an arrow into one of the yearlings. However, the wounded animal did not fall, but the whole bunch ran across a ridge and disappeared in the timber a mile away.

Steve followed slowly, expecting to find his game either dead or lying down, and in the latter case, he expected to kill it with another shot. But the deer got his wind and traveled across an open space into another piece of timber.

When Steve reached this second piece of timber, daylight began to fade, and as the evening was cloudy, Steve knew that he would have a hard time finding camp. The evening was warm, and he decided to spend the night out and look for his game in the morning.

He had stayed out several nights during the spring and knew that his father and Wahita would not be alarmed at his not returning to camp. Not having intended to stay out over night he had not taken steel and tinder with him, and was therefore not able to make a fire. However, as the night was warm, he selected a bed on the soft dry needles of some young pines and being very tired after his long stalk, he soon fell asleep. He had by this time acquired some of the characteristics of the Indian hunters, who, like the wild creatures they hunt, sleep lightly, especially in an open camp.

Something, he did not know what, caused him to wake up. He sat up and listened. Something was slowly stalking in the thicket a few rods away, evidently following his trail. Steve got his bow ready and felt for his hunting-knife. What could it be? Was it possible that the Blackfeet had discovered him and were now trying to fall upon him? No Blackfeet had been seen in the foothill country all winter, although the three lone hunters

had kept a sharp lookout for them every day. However, this might be the time when the long-expected blow would fall. Steve's heart beat fast, but he was not afraid. He felt sure that he could see an approaching enemy before the enemy could see him. He would send an arrow into any Blackfoot that tried to get his scalp and then he would quietly creep farther back into the thicket.

He listened with all his senses wide awake. Now the stealthy enemy was quiet, now he was moving again. He was approaching. Steve sat up on his knees to be able to put more drive behind his arrow.

All at once a terrible scream rang through the forest which made Steve's blood run cold and almost caused him to drop his bow. The thought flashed through his mind that he was surrounded by a dozen howling Blackfeet. But quickly a second fiendish scream followed the first, and Steve knew that a panther or mountain lion was stalking him.

He almost wished that it had been Blackfeet instead of this uncanny big cat. He

listened again, while his heart almost stopped beating. Would the beast really attack him? Wahita had said they very seldom did. The creature was slowly circling around him. He might send an arrow toward it, but he could not hope to kill it with an arrow, even if he should hit it; and wounding the beast would only enrage it and might cause it to attack.

But the horrible beast was slowly coming closer as it circled around Steve's bed. The boy tried to pierce the darkness, but it was impossible to catch a glimpse of the beast on account of the cloudy night and the cover of the trees, and so cautiously and cat-like did the animal move that only now and then a slight noise betrayed that the beast of terrible claws and teeth was still stalking the frightened boy. A frisky little red squirrel would have made much more noise than the big prowling panther.

Never did Steve wish so much that he could build a fire. With a fire he would have felt safe, for every wild beast fears the mystery of fire.

At last the strain became too great for the lad to sit still and listen any longer. He did not dare break away and run, for that, he feared, would surely induce the panther to spring upon him; moreover, it was too dark to run. There was only one thing to do. He rose to his feet, reached carefully up the bole of the tree and with a few vigorous exertions he pulled himself up among the branches.

He stopped to breathe and listen. Now the big, lank cat could, at least, not suddenly spring upon him out of the darkness. But it was still there. He fancied that he could hear the switching of its long tail, and he heard plainly the faint cracking of a twig as the brute slowly circled around the clump of trees in which Steve was concealed.

The lad was now free from the dread of an immediate attack, but how long, he asked himself, would he have to stay perched among the branches? The prowling cat remained motionless for considerable periods and then it began again to move slowly and almost in silence around Steve's place of concealment.

The boy wondered if he would have to hang on among the branches all night. In despair he grasped a dry branch which broke with a loud snap, like the report of a pistol. He hurled the branch in the direction of the nocturnal brute; at the same time uttering a yell to the utmost of his lung power. Then he heard a noise as of some large animal rushing away through trees and brush, and the panther was gone.

Steve waited awhile to make sure that it was not coming back, then he climbed down, for his legs and arms were beginning to ache and tremble with fatigue. He stretched himself on the pine needles and resolved never again to stay away from camp during the night. He wondered why the panther had stalked him. It was not possible that he was impelled by hunger, for game was plentiful in the foothill country.

After awhile he fell into an uneasy sleep, in which he fought with Blackfeet and panthers and other wild beasts. At the first dawn of day he awoke with a start, for he had been

dreaming that he heard again the blood-curdling scream of the panther.

When he realized that he had been dreaming and that it would soon be daylight, he murmured: "Thanks to the good Lord that I came through this night!" and as soon as it was light enough to travel, he started for camp.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE LAST JOURNEY AND THE LONGEST

AFTER Steve had told of his night with the panther, his father was determined to leave the camp at the rim rock as soon as the new grass had started so that their horses could find food.

“That boy will get killed in some way if we don’t get out of the Indian country. If it isn’t Indians, it will be bears or panthers or something else,” he said to Wahita.

The old Indian was not so much impressed by the danger to which Steve had been exposed.

“Panther would not eat boy,” he commented, “panther is a coward, but grizzly is brave, he would kill boy and man, too.”

“Why did the panther stalk him?” asked McLean.

“He wants to know,” Wahita replied, “he

just wants to know. He is—curious, as the white people call it. The boy's trail was a new smell to him, he followed to find out who made the trail. Of course, boy got much scared."

A few days later Wahita came to camp with a story which impressed him more than Steve's panther story. He had not only found signs of Indians, he had seen Indians.

Two Blackfeet on horseback had been within half a mile of the stockade. He felt sure they had seen the stockade, because they had stopped and turned their horses on a spot from which the stockade was just visible among the yellow pines. Wahita had carefully followed their tracks and had seen the two horsemen riding rapidly northward toward the region where the Blackfeet were hunting and camping.

"We are discovered now," he concluded his story. "In a few days, a large war party will come up. They will scatter among the trees and will try to catch us."

As soon as it was dark the three friends left

for good the camp which had afforded them a safe shelter for more than half a year.

“We must go now,” Wahita had urged. “To-morrow we may be surrounded and may not be able to get away.”

All night long they rode in a southerly and southeasterly direction. They followed no special route, in fact there were no trails in the country except game trails, and those generally followed the water courses. When morning dawned, they stopped near a small stream in a clump of cottonwoods. Wahita scanned the country around for signs of Indians, but while he discovered bands of buffalo, elk, deer, and antelope, he found no signs of Indians. The country seemed to be an uninhabited wilderness.

After their horses had fed and rested a few hours, they continued their journey and rode till evening, when they camped in some small timber on a creek.

While McLean and Steve tethered the horses, the Indian quickly built a small fire in a bend of the creek under a high bank,

where the fire was not visible from a distance, and when Steve and his father returned, Wahita had a kettleful of hot broth and boiled antelope meat ready for supper.

"We can sleep all night," he said, when, after supper, he leaned against the clay bank smoking his very much blackened pipe. "We have made seventy or eighty miles and the Blackfeet cannot catch us."

"They will crawl around the stockade," he continued with a chuckle, "for a day, may be for two. They are afraid to go near. Then one man says, 'I am a brave warrior. I go in.' He goes in. He finds nothing but old moccasins. They all go in. They talk much bad talk in Blackfeet. They say, 'We were fools not to come here long ago.' They want to know who was there, but they can't tell. We fooled them. We are too far away; they can't catch us."

Very soon the little camp-fire was put out. The three horsemen wrapped themselves in their blankets and fell asleep after their long and hard ride. For an hour longer the

horses cropped the young grass till their hunger was appeased, then they also lay down to rest.

In the same watchful manner the three horsemen traveled along the foothills day after day, and week after week. They crossed many small streams and a few larger ones. What those streams were they did not know. The streams they crossed during the first two weeks, they felt reasonably sure, flowed toward the Missouri. As far as possible they avoided exposing themselves against the sky-line, and when they discovered Indians or signs of Indians in the neighborhood they traveled by night.

On one occasion they were discovered by a scout of a large party of what they believed to be Crow Indians. That evening they built a large false camp-fire a quarter of a mile from their actual camp, and as soon as their horses had had a little time to feed and rest, they stole away and traveled all night.

After they had been journeying in this way for about a month, they fell in, to their great

surprise, with a party of nine white men, who were preparing to trap beaver along the headwaters of a fairly large river.

These trappers told that they had come from St. Louis to the country of the friendly Mandans in the present State of North Dakota. From there they had traveled across the prairie and along the foothills until they had struck this very fine beaver country. They expected to stay here until each had made a fortune in beaver skins, when they expected to return to St. Louis. There had originally been seventeen men in the party, but one had died of some illness, one had been killed by a buffalo, one had started after a grizzly bear and had never come back, and the other five had been killed by Indians.

“These men are all big fools,” Wahita said in the evening as the three friends sat at their own little camp-fire. “They don’t watch, they don’t build a fort. Some day the Indians will find them and steal all their fur and kill them. They will never get back to St. Louis.”

The trappers did not know on what river they were camping. Some thought it was the Platte, others believed it to be the Arkansas, some thought it was the Red River of the South.

The time had now come when Wahita either had to turn back toward the north or had to go with his white friends to St. Louis and then go north with some traders. The old man was determined to make his way back across the plains all alone.

“The traders cannot protect me,” he said, “but I can look out if I am alone. I am safer alone.

“You must not stay with these men,” he warned his friends. “They will all get killed. You must build a boat and go down this river, which will take you to the big river of St. Louis, because all rivers in this country flow into that big river which the white people call Mississippi. When you find that big river, you can easily find St. Louis, because some white man will tell you that you must travel up the river or down

the river to go to the fort. You must not travel farther on the horses, because you do not know and I do not know and the trappers do not know in what direction to go to St. Louis. So you would be lost and go this way and that way and some day some bad Indians would capture you and kill you.”

With the aid of a few spikes bought, and an auger borrowed of the trappers, the three friends built a crude boat of hewn cottonwood boards.

Then came a sad day of parting. With tears in their eyes McLean and Steve saw their true old friend start on the dangerous journey for his distant home in the big swamps on Hudson Bay. When the old man had waved them his last farewell from a ridge a mile away, McLean and Steve untied their boat and glided down-stream. They also had still a long and dangerous journey ahead of them, but they felt that their old faithful friend would be exposed to far greater dangers.

McLean and Steve had plenty of food and

they also carried several valuable packs of fur which they had bought of the trappers in exchange for their horses. They did most of their traveling by night, while during the daytime they rested in the seclusion of some willows and other bushes. Wahita had strongly urged this as the only safe plan. They often saw Indians from their hiding-places, but only once were they discovered by a party of three Indians. These three Indians camped toward evening a short distance above them. As a matter of precaution, Steve and his father lay down in the boat which was tied to the shore by a string of rawhide. When father and son discovered the Indians close to their camp they dropped down-stream another mile, but the redskins followed and camped a short distance above. This maneuver they repeated three times.

Then McLean and Steve were convinced that the reds had some evil design in mind which had to be met by bold action. So they walked, with guns ready, straight up to the

camp of the reds and McLean told them by unmistakable signs:

“You followed us three times. If you follow us again we will shoot you!”

Father and son then traveled down-stream the greater part of the night, but the three reds had understood and were not seen again.

At the end of two weeks the two lost travelers came to a trading-post kept by a white man, who told them that they were on the Arkansas River, and in two weeks more they reached St. Louis in safety, which ended their years of wandering by water and by land.

Of the trappers, whom they had left on the upper Arkansas, only one ever returned to St. Louis. The others were cut off by Indians, just as Wahita had predicted.

McLean and Steve selected a piece of land on the rich black soil which lies between St. Louis and the small town of St. Charles, and soon became prosperous frontier farmers.

Steve wrote a long letter to the cook at York Factory, telling about their trip and asking that the news be told to Wahita in

case he also had returned to his own people

It took almost two years before a long letter reached St. Louis, telling that after meeting many dangers and hardships, Wahita had reached Red River, and was now living as a happy old man at Hudson Bay.

Of the party of buffalo-hunters with whom Steve and his father and Wahita had started from Red River, only ten men had returned. All the others had fallen victims to their carelessness.

Wahita had an endless string of stories to tell, the letter said, about the wonderful time he had had and of the many adventures he met in the company of his two white friends.

“The story he enjoys most,” the letter closed, “is the one in which he tells how the white boy almost burst with impatience in the eagle-pit and how the big grizzly came and chased him and the boy up a tree.”

Here ends the story of Steve and his father, and of Wahita, the Cree of the big swamps of the Great Wild North.

THE END

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